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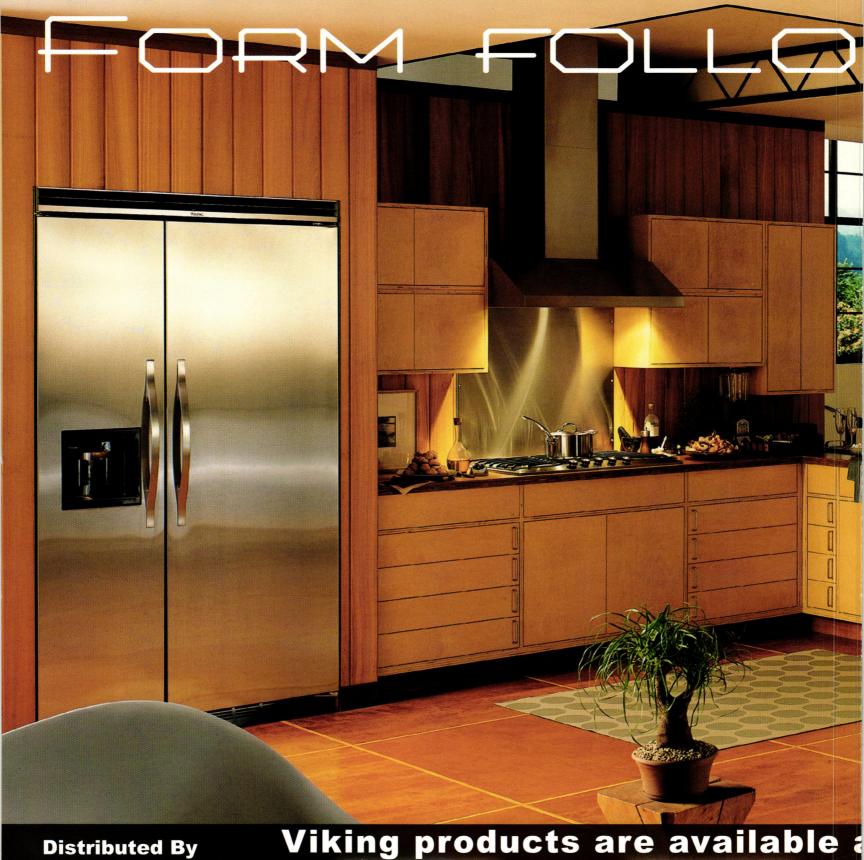
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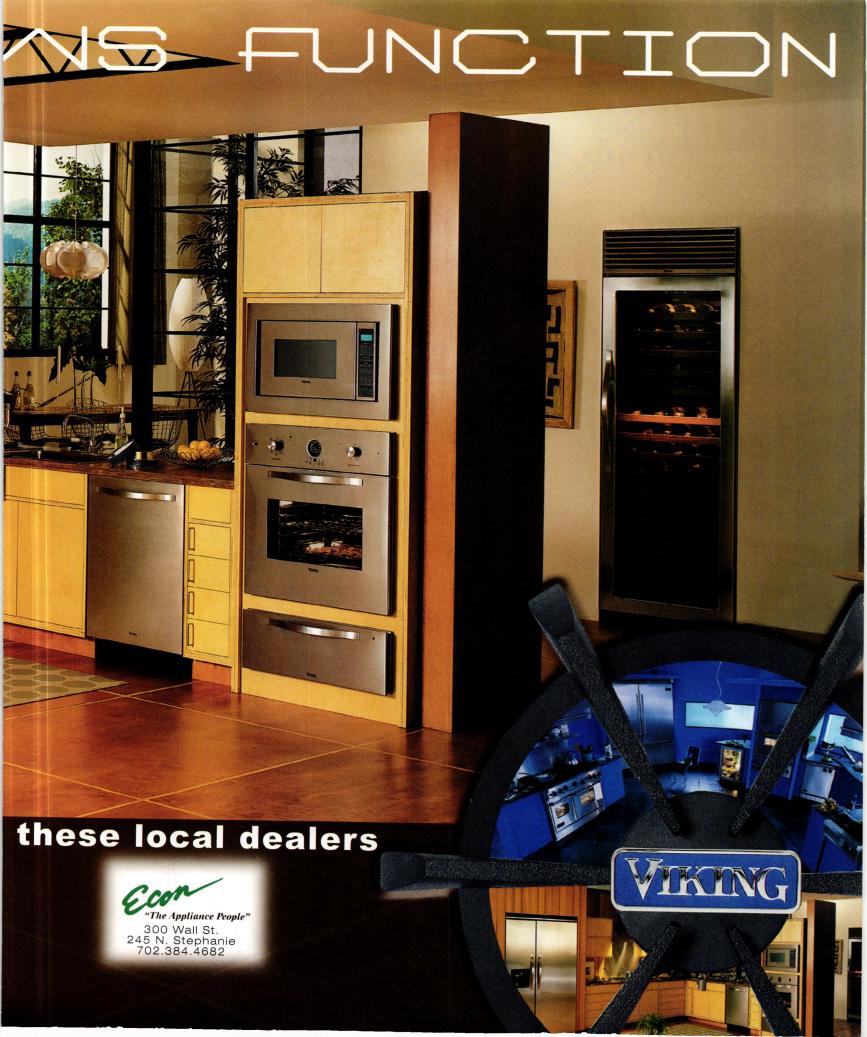
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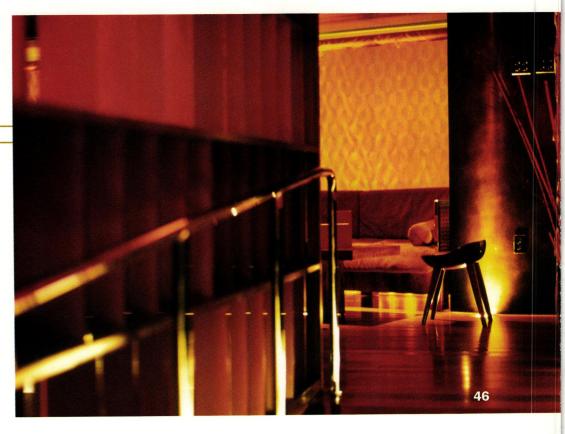
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Photograph by Joseph Pickett III. Makeup by Oksana Hagood. Hair by Sandi Grossano.

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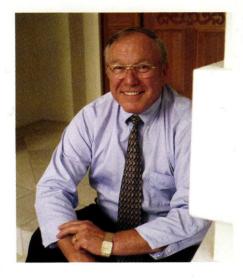
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Evidence of the Dream

This fourth edition of Architecture Las Vegas

continues the dialogue about our city and its buildings, spaces and style. As in previous editions, we look at our architecture as a direct reflection of our culture. From shopping to nightclubbing, that culture is rooted in entertainment and recreation. Whether over-the-top and controversial or quietly effective, the architecture that forms these experiences and adventures is one-ofa-kind. It's uniquely ours.



In June, the national president of the American Institute of Architects, Thompson E. Penney, FAIA, visited Las Vegas, and after strolling the Strip among crowds of tourists and being adequately inspired by our city, he commented, "This is solid evidence that if you can dream it, you can build it."

As with dreams, Las Vegas architecture offers something for everyone. There are magnificent settings for some of the nation's top chefs, outstanding spaces for shows and entertainment, spectacular retail shopping, dancing waters with music, burning volcanoes, places to see fabulous art collections and botanical wonders, along with special spaces for nightlife, clubs and bars. In this issue, we zoom in on the design and architecture involved in creating entertainment and retail venues. Writer Geoff Carter hosts an entertaining comparison of Las Vegas nightclubs, where often the latest is the greatest ("Finding Club Utopia," Page 46), while our annual guest critic, David Hay of New York City, guides us through three of our most daring new off-Strip restaurants ("Building an Appetite," Page 33). The hottest new place in Vegas, however, might be Downtown's Icehouse, which combines the best of both worlds—clubs and restaurants. (Editor Phil Hagen's interview with designer Charles Gruwell starts on Page 52.)

Cutting-edge design and innovation are hallmarks of the architecture that is here. Our cover story on Avery Brooks & Associates by Amy Schmidt (Page 40) provides a unique perspective on a new firm that has raised the bar with regard to design techniques for interiors. Residential design is also being lifted to a new level out in the Ridges ("The Language of the Desert," Page 27), where design requirements for the new upscale community in Summerlin are inspiring architects to stretch their imaginations and design skills, while clients stretch their budgets and expand their horizons.

Just as architecture is one of the engines that makes Las Vegas the fastest growing community in the country, it also helps to drive our tourist industry and maintain our economy. In a recent survey of Las Vegas tourists, most of our 35 million annual visitors indicated that, when in Las Vegas, "sightseeing" is at the top of their agenda. And what is it they sightsee? It's the architecture—the magnificent hotel-casinos, restaurants, attractions, public spaces, and shopping and entertainment venues that make up this most unusual place.

This special interest the world has in our city is but one of the elements that sustains the idea of Architecture Las Vegas. On behalf of the Las Vegas Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, I want to thank the Architecture Las Vegas team, including the AIA editorial board, all of the writers and editors, our advertisers, and certainly the Greenspun Media Group for its leadership and spirit in providing this most important chapter publication so that we can continue the dialogue on and celebration of Las Vegas architecture.

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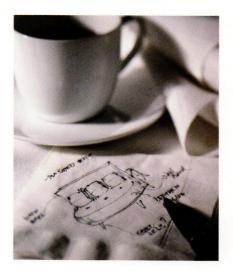
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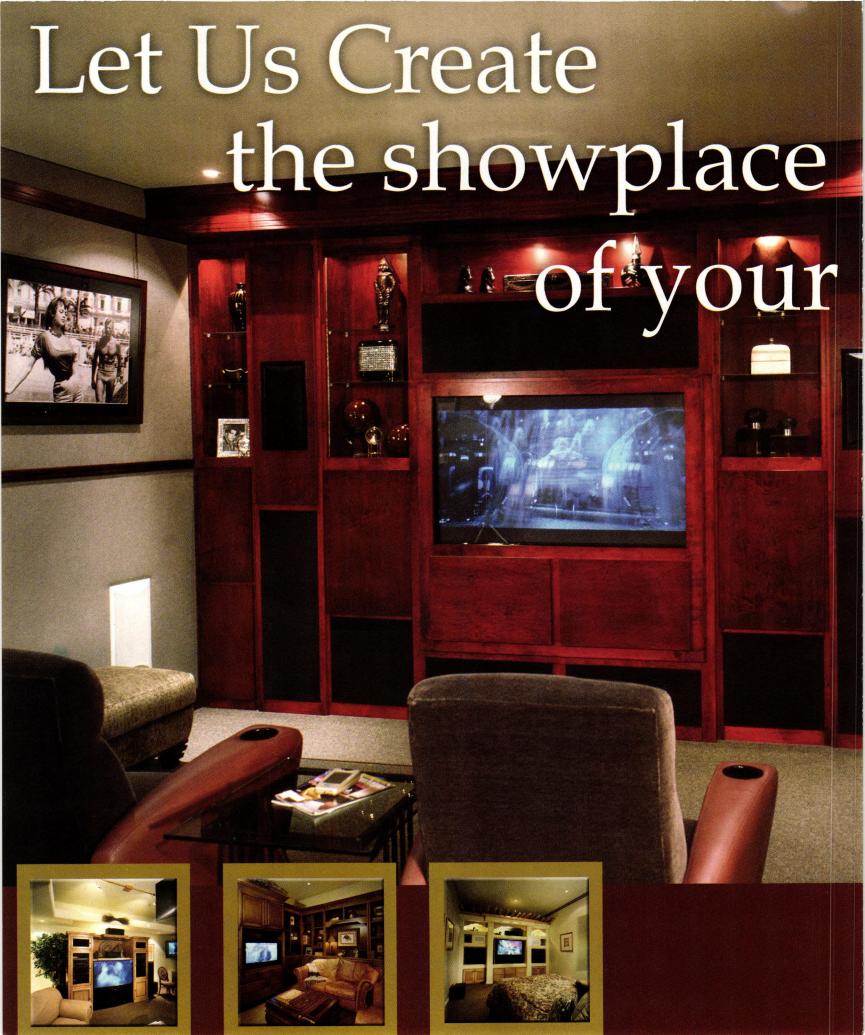


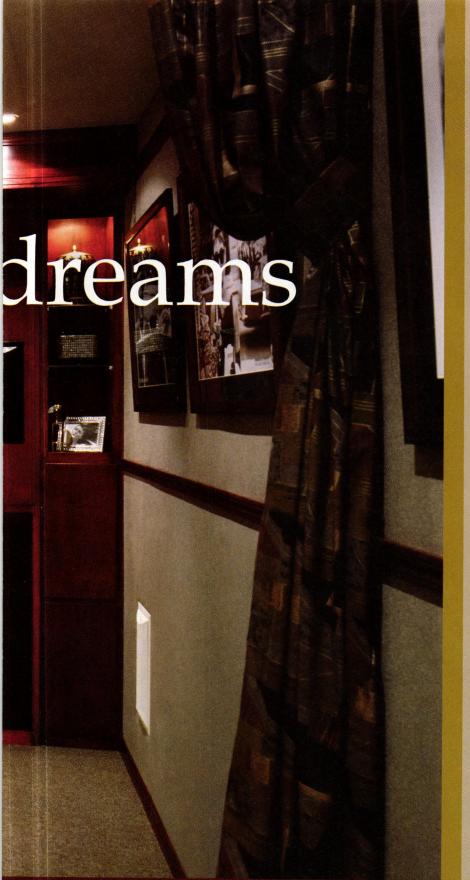


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Shaping Things to Come

New UNLV architecture school boss Michael Kroelinger on the university, the city and how they might help one another

Michael Kroelinger who was hired in January as director of

UNLV's School of Architecture, knows a thing or two about the challenge of designing in the Southwest. For 22 years, he taught at Arizona State University, where he remains professor emeritus at the College of Architecture and Environmental Design. Now, at UNLV. he will combine his knowledge of the desert's demands and the demands of big-time academia to head a program in another arid and fast-growing city—one, like Phoenix, with a constant need for new architectural ideas and solutions.

ALV: How does Las Vegas compare to the Phoenix area?

MK: There are a lot of commonalities between the two cities. Take away the superficiality of the Strip, and a lot of the growth, development, planning, water and transportation issues are literally the same, or very close to the same. Both are rapidly growing desert cities and going through similar patterns of growth.

ALV: What's your favorite place/space/building in Vegas?

MK: One of them, of course, would be the Lied Library on (Continued)

Interview by Christopher Hagen

Photo by Jenna Bodnar

New&Notable

Downtown's 61-Acre Puzzle ... Loft Living ... Bavarian Theming ... Another Station

"We're on fire here in Las Vegas," Mayor Oscar Goodman says. Not because the Las Vegas Events Center (which we described glowingly in the last issue) went down in flames. Rather, he's referring to the new construction on five acres at F Street and Grand Central Parkway adjacent to the city's key 61-acre development parcel.

The project brings together a trio of longtime Vegas companies: developer and owner the Molasky Group of Companies, Howard F. Thompson Architect and Camco Pacific Construction Company. Molasky Group President Richard Worthington expects to break ground in November on Phase One of the project, which will house IRS offices in a four-story, 90,000-square-foot, \$20 million tower. The exterior, Worthington says, is "fitting for a federal facility," with architectural colored glass, integrated concrete curtain walls and brushed chrome columns. The architects have worked extensively with IRS employees on interior design, which will be contemporary—finished in grays, browns, blacks. Projected completion is early 2005.

Nearby, the 435,000-square-foot Las Vegas Premium Outlets mall has just opened its doors, and the World Market Center will soon break ground on its 1.3 million-square-foot furniture mart.

Meanwhile, at the 61-acre site itself, Kimley-Horn and Associates, RNL, Design Workshop and the development task force have been making "a lot of progress," according to project administrator Dick Oglesby. They started at "ground zero," like prospective developers, compiling engineering information, doing soil and traffic studies, and drawing horizontal schematics. In mid-September, the plan will be presented to the City Council, along with budget proposals for the next phase, which will entail actual engineering, preparation of technical documents and design work. In 12 to 18 months. parcels will be ready for sale by the nonprofit owner/developer, City Parkway.

The plan is shaping up to feature a mixed-use urban village on much of the property, with office, retail, residential (presumably apartments) and open space (plans call for a park). "The vision," says Oglesby, "is to bring the community back to the center of the city. We have hit our boundaries, and now we are experiencing the trampoline effect, bouncing back to the center." The task force also continues to explore the academic medical campus, which would sit on about 20 acres at the north end of the property. An agreement with the Cleveland Clinic for a feasibility study is being prepared, Oglesby says, and discussions are being held with the University of Nevada School of Medicine, which is looking into developing a new academic medical center.

One piece of the 61-acre puzzle seems to be dancing into place with the city's grant of five acres to the Las Vegas Performing Arts Center Foundation. The project is campus, but I have to say my opportunities to explore and to critically assess haven't started yet.

ALV: The ugliest place you've seen so far?

MK: Well, to me, as in any city where there's rapid growth and change, some of the strip malls that you encounter at major intersections become, shall we say, opportunities for future improvement.

ALV: Downtown redevelopment is a big issue here. If you were in charge, what would you do first?

MK: I've had just a little bit of time Downtown, and very superficial. But the school does have an architecture studio that devotes its time to projects Downtown [See Page 74]. It's led by one of our part-time faculty who works at the city, Steve van Gorp. Obviously, that area between true Downtown and the north end of the Strip is certainly ripe for redevelopment. And I think you can begin to work out from there and say that there are probably half a dozen to a dozen areas that are really prime opportunities to explore new ideas of what Downtown ought to be like. I hope we have some of our studios exploring broad concepts like that over the next couple of years.

ALV: Describe the issues facing architecture on the UNLV campus. MK: The interesting thing to me is the funding structure, with endowments funding most buildings on campus. And while there are

"I hope in five years this school is thoroughly engaged in the critical regional issues that shape Las Vegas and the surrounding community."

individually interesting buildings, there's not that fabric that links things together here that you see at other universities. That's not necessarily a negative. I think this campus can become a very interesting and exciting campus. I do hope we begin to think more about the landscape, about the

negative spaces between buildings and the periphery of the campus. Our planning has to consider beyond just the west side of Maryland Parkway, for example. We have to consider how areas around the university emerge and develop as links to the campus.

ALV: Describe the school of architecture five years from now.

MK: It's a very young school of architecture. It has one of the best structures possible today to support the four disciplines—architecture, interior architecture, landscape architecture and planning. I hope in five years this school is thoroughly engaged in the critical regional issues that shape Las Vegas and the surrounding community. I hope that we're able to identify issues that are local and regional, but that have a global impact.

ALV: You're an extremely busy person with wide-ranging responsibilities—do you like this?

MK: I'm one of those people who likes to stay busy all the time. I enjoy being engaged in new initiatives, new activities. I don't like the status quo. I really like to build and develop things, and if I look back at the pattern of the history of the things I've done, most activities have been linked around that. And I don't mean "build buildings," but I mean "build programs, build reputations, build the value and expertise of our faculty and students," and those kinds of things.

in a "pre-planning phase" now, says Vice Chairman Keith Boman, Current thinking calls for the center to be home to the Las Vegas Philharmonic and Nevada Ballet Theatre, with two theaters-for concerts or more intimate performances—in a 250,000-square-foot edifice. The foundation has hired a coordinator for its efforts, is interviewing arts consultants and looks to begin fund-raising by year's end.

Booming **Henderson** is streamlining its developmental services. HCA Architects, under contract for City Hall projects since 1997, has designed Phase III of the complex, which will house 40,000 square feet of the newly centralized facilities. The Dick Corporation began construction in December 2001 on the six-story, 220,000square-foot, \$41.6 million project, which will bridge the existing City Hall and the public safety building. The facility also includes secured underground parking, data room, print shop, media studio, amphitheater and civic center plaza. City construction manager John Simmons has scheduled a September 6 opening date.

"The best example of a mixed-use project I've ever seen," said one planning commissioner. This one, though, is in Henderson, and is a first for the city. American Nevada Company is developing The Shops at Green Valley Ranch on a 30-acre site east of the Station hotel-casino. Howard Perlman has designed the \$80 million project, which McCarthy Building Company is scheduled to complete by April. The 400,000 square feet of floor space in seven buildings will front a tree-lined, pedestrian-friendly street. "Upscale lifestyle shops" and restaurants will occupy the first floor, offices will be located on the second of some buildings, and 88 apartments are designed into floors two and three. The apartments will be luxury and will include such amenities as underground parking, private elevators, full-time concierge service, a library, fitness center and roof-top garden. The building facades will utilize variations in color and design so that they appear to have been built over time.

Clark County has been awarded an \$8,000 Design Grant from the Nevada Arts Council. Three public artists/designers selected in a regional competition are bending their talents to enhancement of the 14-mile pedestrian and bicycle Flamingo Arroyo Trail. One novel idea, suggested by top-scoring artist Buster Simpson, is the use of solar power to pump "nuisance water" from the wash to irrigate trail vegetation in areas where regular high-maintenance irrigation is not feasible. The first stretch to receive attention will be from Maryland Parkway to the Wetlands Park, says Diane Bush, who oversees the county's Galleries and Arts Education programs. The project is on hold pending receipt of funding, but the hope is to begin paving in the fall. When completed, users will be able to access the trail from several entry points, including ones along Maryland Parkway, Boulder Highway and the Wetlands Park.

Closer to the glitz of the Strip-and depicting another aspect of our heritage-is the Liberace Museum. The recent remodeling garnered the 2003 Outstanding Design



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Fire. House.

Should a public building always look public?



The City of Las Vegas house-like firehouse at Buffalo and Washington (above), and the county's latest, at Southern Highlands (below).

Chances are, the house you live in looks a lot like the house next to it. You live in a "development," after all, and the development has certain standards. The development across the street has standards, too: The houses there also look a lot like yours. The only house in the neighborhood that doesn't look like yours is the neighborhood firehouse, which looks like, well, a firehouse.

That problem has now been solved. Introducing ... firehouses that look like vour house!

Across the Valley, fire stations are starting to appear that blur the traditional aesthetic divide between public and private architecture. There is a practical reason for this: You asked for it. Firehouse designs, which have tended toward a modern, angular aesthetic in recent years, regularly generate a good deal of noise at zoning meetings. Louis Baker, construction projects administrator for Las Vegas Fire and Rescue, says the city's new prototype, which favors a Southwestern motif in residential areas, has made neighborhood acceptance a lot easier.

"Part of the driving force was, let's create some softness to the station as opposed to a strictly commercial look," Baker says. "A lot of times you're right next to the neighborhood; you've got homes around you. It's nice to blend the building in." The new look includes arches, stucco, tile roofs, desert landscaping and other familiar elements of Las Vegas residential design. Baker says the city will still dress stations in commercial areas in more modern garb: Station 5 at Charleston and Hinson, for instance, will use the new structural prototype but will have a modern look, with cleaner lines, some metal accents, and a lot less stucco. The fact remains, however, that the city's growth is primarily in residential areas, so the "house" look will hold sway most of the time. Examples of the city's "house" designs can be seen at Buffalo and Washington (Station 44) and on Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard near Charleston (Station 10). (Continued)

Story by Greg Blake Miller

Photos by Christopher Smith



Award from the local chapter of the Construction Specifications Institute, Leo A Daly Planning, Engineering, Architecture, Interiors faced the challenge of making a quarter-century-old museum appeal to a generation unfamiliar with this prototypical Vegas entertainer. The design by managing principal Francis X. Dumont, AIA, combines architecture, video, exhibits, dining and periodic live entertainment to recapture "the virtuosity of a Liberace musical performance." The 1.500-square-foot project was completed by Oakview Construction to the tune of \$956,000.

Last issue we detailed the Strip scene exhaustively, and so now we report only that major activity in this area has proceeded per schedule. During the next couple of years we will add nearly 7,000 more upscale lodging rooms (including 1,000 for Caesars' new tower), a host of convention facilities and dramatic new retail exposure on the boulevard by Fashion Show and the Forum Shops at Caesars, whose expansion will sport a spiral escalator.

The emergent Strip motif is sex, as major resorts turn to topless swimming pools and strip-teasing nightlife venues rising to the challenge presented by the 13 topless joints that have opened nearby in the past four years. Near Reno. The Wild Horse Canvon Ranch and Spa opened in June, complete with a "negotiation room" and parlor "reminiscent of a library in a men's club or fine hotel," including paintings, etchings and mounted heads. Themed suites include the "Marilyn Monroe" with wall-towall mirrors, and the "African Safari." Down here, Heidi Fleiss has been touting an Australian adventurer's plan to build a \$75 million entertainment complex with 50-room brothel close to Clark County—contingent on financing.

Moving from bimbos to beer ... East of the Strip on Paradise Road at Harmon sits a replication of the 1589 Munich Hofbrauhaus that is expected to open in late October. Stefan Gastager, president of HBavaria, obtained a 30-year license for the venture from the Bavarian government and commissioned Perlman Architects and R&O Construction to do the job. Project architect J.R. Ravis says the exterior is very close to exact duplication—with molded synthetic stucco instead of the original lime and cement. "Such a project has unique challenges," he says. "How to replicate everything they did back then, while meeting the UBC requirements-working in the fire alarm, sprinkler systems, or air conditioning with the vaulted ceilings and the curves." The 18,600-square-foot structure houses, most notably, the main dining room (beer hall) with 25-foot ceilings, and the biergarten complete with fountain, (artificial) chestnut trees and columns stretching three stories to the (faux) Bavarian sky. Weissbier, oder dunkel?

A few blocks north, an amalgam of-according to advertisements-"Luxury Loft Living" will appear in the near-Strip high-rise condo market. Metropolis proposes to overlook the new Wynn Las Vegas golf course. The 18story, 65-unit, \$40 million project by two Houston firms—developer Randall Davis Company and Spencer Partnership Architects—seeks to square "turn-of-the-century cosmopolitan elegance" with an "art deco look."

Away from the Strip, the dueling locals-casino giants each have a major new project under way. Station Casinos plans to break ground on Red Rock Station, on the



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The city moved away from its previous prototype, created in the late 1980s, primarily for functional reasons: The old design, for instance, had only two vehicle bays while the new one has three, and the new bays are larger. The effort to improve functionality influenced aesthetics to some extent—the new prototype is much less angular. Baker says the old angles, while attractive, made space less efficient and flexible than the right angles of the new design.

The city's prototype was created in-house. The Clark County Fire Department, on the other hand, contracts outside architects. These commissions have resulted in some notable public buildings: Clark County's sleek, modern Fire Station 25 on South Pecos, for example, won a 1999 AIA design award for the department's go-to firm, Carpenter Sellers, as well as an award from the National Association of Industrial and Office Properties. After years of sponsoring distinctively public designs, though, the county recently unveiled a Carpenter Sellers station at Southern Highlands that echoes the area's Tuscan residential style.

There is no blanket plan to build residential-style stations, says Ron Cameron, strategic services manager for the county fire department, but because developers participate in the funding and approval of neighborhood stations, they also participate in shaping their aesthetics. In the case of Southern Highlands, the developers wanted to retain the stylistic integrity of the neighborhood. Elsewhere, as at Rhodes Ranch, developers have chosen to go with a more modern "public" firehouse design.

"Our standard prototype is still the more modern design, but when developers are involved, they have the option to change the elevation," Cameron says. "Everything's negotiable. The county still has final approval, but as long as a design maintains county codes and county specs, we'll go with it."

southeast corner of Interstate 215 and Charleston, in mid-2004. Spokeswoman Leslev Pittman says they are "still evaluating the size and scope of the project and the amenity package."

Meanwhile, Coast Casinos is attacking the southern market with its year-end groundbreaking for Southcoast on a 55-acre site at Silverado Ranch and Las Vegas boulevards. (This is part of the 212-acre SouthPointe masterplanned parcel, which, according to developer South Las Vegas, will contain a 50-acre time-share with 30 12-story buildings.) Reports are that Coast Chairman Michael Gaughan is not disclosing costs nor design features in order to protect the plans from Station Casinos. One rumor, though, has it that both will end with startlingly similar, cutting-edge, desert-appropriate architecture.

Moving on to one of mankind's nobler pursuits, education, where thankfully there is much to report. At UNLV, the long-delayed John S. Wright Hall project got under way this spring with the demolition of the auditorium and the north wing of the main building. Burke and Associates, operating in very tight quarters, has begun renovating the remaining 20,000 square feet and adding a three-story, 60,000-square-foot synthetic stucco and sandstone structure. KGA Architecture developed the plan for the sensitive site, along the north-south campus mall. Upon completion, it will house students and faculty of history, political science and anthropology. The \$20 million project is scheduled for completion sometime during the spring 2005 semester.



The Man Who Thought Us Out of the Box

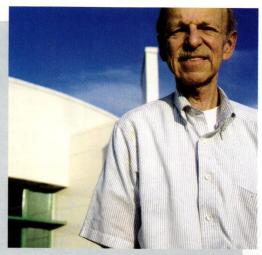
There is, strictly speaking, nothing

wrong with a concrete block box. You can make it big or you can make it small. You can paint it or you can not paint it. You can put things in it, pretty much anything you want. And yet the box, for all its virtues, can have the curious effect of causing people to want to avoid it and to be somewhat disappointed when it appears in their neighborhood. Historically, the greatest boxbuilders have been governments, because governments need to explain to taxpayers where the money went, and they like to be able to point to the concrete block box and say, Well, it didn't go there.

Architect Ralph Bond, AIA Emeritus, made it his mission to end the reign of the concrete block box. This was a risky proposition for a man who was, after all, working for the government. Yet when Bond retired in May after 28 years working for Clark County, he had succeeded. He was tireless, and tirelessly creative, in helping the county find a new architectural approach that was both cost-effective and attractive. "It's been fun," he says, "doing the buildings that provide

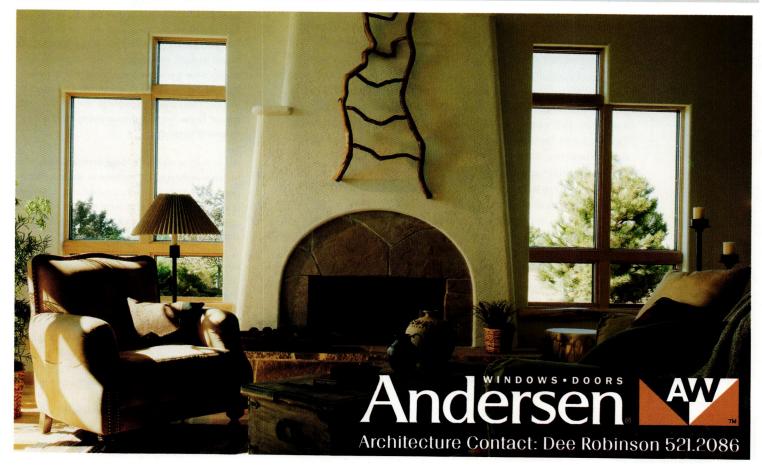
services, enhancing the experience for both employees and users, making them convenient and yet aesthetically pleasing."

From 1975-88, Bond was design and construction manager at the county's University Medical Center, where he supervised the hospital's largest expansion, the Burn Care and Obstetrical and Neonatal units. In 1988, Bond moved to the county offices, and from 1992-2000 he served as manager of architecture and design. There, he administered county projects ranging from swimming pool pump houses to the huge Department of Family Services building on North Pecos, which won a U.S. Criminal Justice Award for functionality. He contracted box-busting architects for projects in which the needy were helped (the social services building on Pinto Lane) and in which identities were cataloged (the Metro fingerprint bureau at Russell Road and Cameron). He demonstrated that taste and waste were not synonyms; a building could feature virtues of form, function and fiscal restraint. During Bond's tenure, the county became a patron of innovative architecture, from Downtown's landmark Clark County

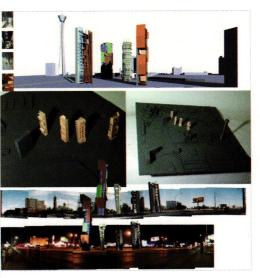


Government Center to fire stations, community centers and court buildings.

"When someone of [Bond's] caliber leaves an organization, that organization suffers," says longtime County Commissioner Bruce Woodbury. "He's going to be hard to replace." Bond's influence not only altered our perceptions of what a government building can look like, it also helped change our perception of what the community itself could look like. Drive down any major street and take a look around: If you see a notable building, chances are there's government business going on inside. "I



Laboratory Las Vegas



The Cal Poly students' vision of retreats for Vegas resort workers.

While the national media always seems either a

step behind in characterizing "Vegas," the academic community has gotten up-to-date and serious in its efforts to study and characterize our city's unique situation. University of Pennsylvania lecturer Susan Snyder, who has brought studios here for the past two years, says Las Vegas is an ideal place for students to investigate. "This is the premier city of the media age. It offers a largerthan-life context that makes contemporary urban and architectural issues more evident and charged." A look at a few of the recent Prestigious U studies of our town:

 Grad students from Harvard's School of Design examined the transitional area between the Strip and Downtown with an eye to redevelopment potential. Of course, they couldn't ignore the Strip, noticing trends such as our "Manhattanization," the island in the middle of a BLM ocean turning inward to build high-rise resi-

dences. And they were surprised to see pedestrian traffic, bucking the auto-domination of most cities.

- While a professor at UNLV, Jose Gamez led a 2000 studio class that pointed out many of the phenomena the Harvard group is studying. Today, with the University of North Carolina-Charlotte, he hasn't stopped the lessons. "The Strip," he says, "illustrates trends happening in most North American cities: more pedestrian-oriented, rooted in tourism and heavily dependent on some form of thematic motif." He points to the use of once-industrial urban landscapes that lend texture to arts or culture zones, and talks of the emerging "experience economy" that is readily identifiable here. "The fairly unregulated context of Las Vegas," Gamez says, "has allowed for some interesting urban situations that might contrast with more tightly regulated environments."
- The University of Pennsylvania's 2002 Las Vegas studio was trumpeted by Mayor Oscar Goodman for suggestions that East Fremont Street could be an "entertainment district" featuring nightclubs, bars and cafés. This year, the group looked at creating "Housing for the Bridget Jones Economy" in our downtown Arts District. Las Vegas, Snyder believes, doesn't offer compelling mixed-use living space for the rapidly growing market of post-college, pre-married folks. "We are targeting this group as an engine of an urban lifestyle that may reinvigorate and recontextualize an underused area of the city."
- A Cal Poly-San Luis Obispo studio class conceived of a series of high-rise retreats for resort workers, offering amenities and an opportunity to gather and interact. The students began the quarter studying the formal and structural characteristics of the Strip and then designed buildings that addressed the area's social and environmental challenges, with special attention paid to cooling, lighting, shading and acoustics.
- The theme for Cal Poly-SLO's annual Design Village was "Vegas Baby!" About 150 students from across the country created shelters accordingly, set them up as a "village" in verdant Poly Canyon and lived in them for three days. Structures were judged on cost efficiency, design quality and just how Vegas they really were. The accommodations were not just for show, though: Design Village was conceived in 1974 to create innovative disaster-relief shelters. And though the village's "Fabulous Las Vegas" sign may not help much in a hurricane, neither will the real one.

President Carol Harter has approved the schematic drawings presented by Dekker Perich Holmes Sabatini for UNLV's Science, Engineering and Technology Building, and the State Public Works Board should have given the go-ahead by press time. The \$75 million project, including a 191,000-square-foot structure, has been designed for response to the desert environment by using natural building elements, and taking advantage of views while offering protection from direct sunlight. The building, DPHS principal Brandon Sprague, AIA, says, will have "a lot of sustainability systems." But another priority is directed toward UNLV's efforts to become a major research institution. And the firm of Earl Walls and Associates is teaming with them on the more technical aspects, such as flex-labs and the promotion of multidisciplinary collaboration. "This will be first-class," Sprague says, "but it's the use of space, rather than specific exterior features, that make it so." If all goes well the 191,000-square-foot structure, which includes a 6,500-square-foot satellite energy plant that will house utilities, will go to bid next fall and be completed within a three-year window.

Dekker Perich Holmes Sabatini has also completed a plan for campus housing that will accommodate 1,600 additional students over the next 10 years. It will tie in with the new campus master plan being worked on by the Smith Group out of Michigan. The process began in 2002 with the "here's what there is" and "here are some proposed scenarios" stage, and is now deep into Phase Two, the schematics, siting malls and paths. These show, according to director of planning and construction Susan Hobbes, AIA, the development of north-south and east-west malls that will link with the existing ones and provide a strong organizing element to the campus when it is built-out.

While there is no immediate implementation of wall or path projects, Hobbes says, "The master plan has already made a positive impact on projects in process." There will be a master plan open house on September 3 (4 p.m. in the Foundation Building), and the completed plan for Phase Two will be presented to the Board of Regents in December.

The addition to the Paul B. Sogg Architecture Building has been delayed due to the need to reconcile higherthan-expected bids to the \$1.2 million budget. At press time, the project is under final bid review and negotiation. If successful in awarding the bid, the building should be completed by July.

On the faculty front, the school has hired Alfredo Fernandez-Gonzalez as an assistant professor. Fernandez-Gonzalez comes to UNLV from Ball State, where he was an assistant professor and resident researcher in the Center for Energy Research/Education and Service. His primary focus will be in environmental control systems and roof ponds. The school also is close to hiring a graduate studio faculty member. These two would be in addition to the architecture school's most important recent addition: Michael Kroelinger, who was hired as director in January (see Story, Page 11).

Meanwhile City of Las Vegas redevelopment officer Steve van Gorp has been asked for (Continued on 75)

Story by Greg Blake Miller and Christopher Hagen



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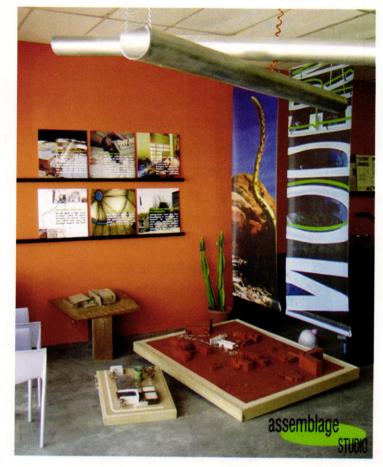
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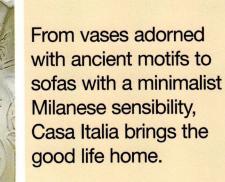
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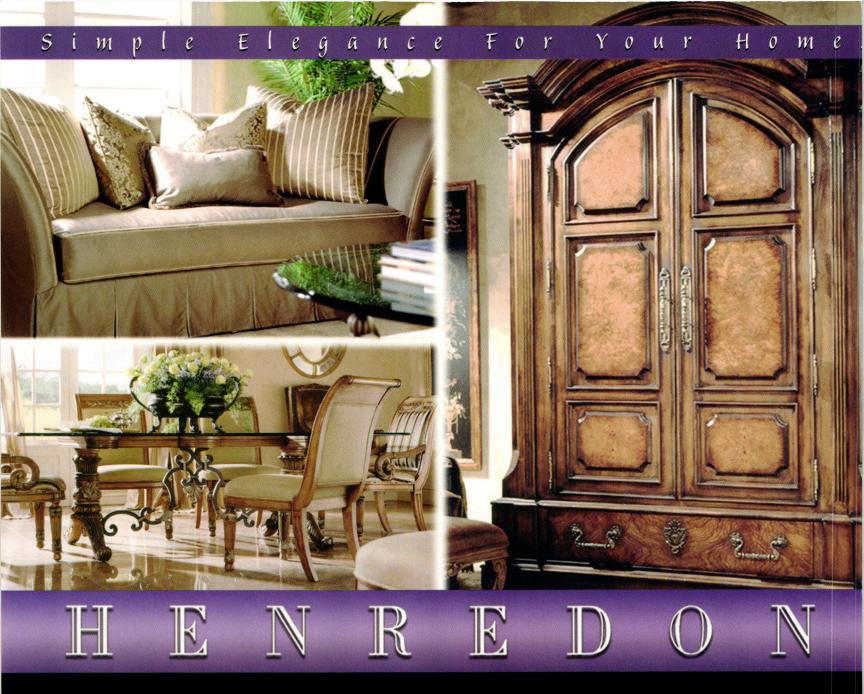






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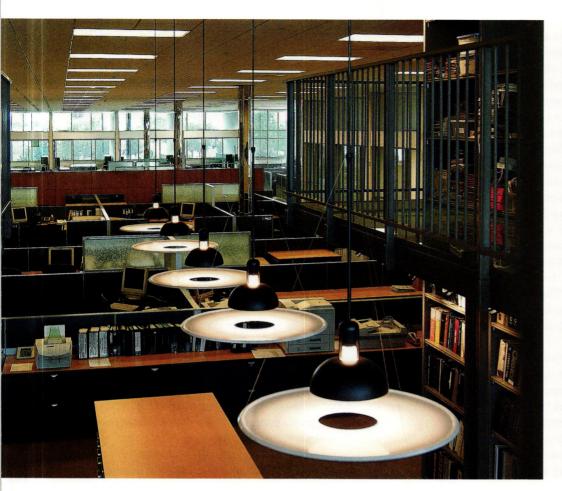
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The Art of Work

Marnell Corrao's new headquarters and business park just upped the ante for Las Vegas office environments

One recent afternoon, in the gleaming travertineand-wood lobby of Marnell Corrao Associates' new office building just off Sunset Road across from McCarran

International Airport, a runner comes in with a delivery. "Boy, this is a nice building," he remarks to the receptionist. "A lot nicer than your other building."

There's no comparison to the company's former offices on Polaris Avenue. But with its generous use of stone, steel, wood and glass, Marnell Corrao has also taken the term "Class A" to a new level for all of Las Vegas. Forking off from the lobby are two corridors lined on one side with movingui, an exotic African wood, and on the other with fritted glass walls that enclose a high-tech conference room. Polished stainless-steel cruciform columns along the corridors and throughout the building mark the space. Even the acoustic ceiling tiles look stylish and finished—no pocked and divoted cardboard here. The corridors terminate in a large, high-ceilinged atrium that evokes a stately college library. It is a quiet, contemplative space that takes you back.

The company's new headquarters "revives an elegant '60s modernism that seems exactly right for the moment, and adds a fillip of Las Vegas pizzazz," says Dr. Libby Lumpkin, a former UNLV professor who now teaches art history at California State University, Long Beach. She's been been tapped by Architectural Digest to write about the building. "It is quite elegant without being minimalist. It becomes a very human space and, at the same time, very rich. Every employee should be treated to such workspace."

It's not difficult to trace the vision. Tony Marnell, CEO of Marnell Corrao, studied architecture at the University of Southern California under a right-hand disciple of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. The efficiency in materials and use of wall planes that inform Mies' work are evident in Marnell's building, which was designed by Marnell Architecture. Massive windows compose the building's exterior, while a 12-foot overhang softens the intense

Natural light floods the Mies-inspired building's design area (left). Steel cruciform columns punctuate a movingui- and fritted-glass-lined corridor.

Story by Jennifer Robison



The building's spare but graceful exterior emphasizes horizontal lines and natural materials.

sunlight into an indirect ambient light. Offices and conference rooms mimic storefronts with their clear glass walls and doors. Other offices skip the fourth wall altogether. Workers have privacy, yet the space's open feel is maintained. The movingui walls stop short of the ceiling. conferring "the feel of a building inside a building" and allowing the light to flow subtly throughout, says Brad Schnepf, president of Marnell Properties.

The 48,000-square-foot building does dabble in motif. Those steel cruciform columns—also inspired by Miesare replicated in the exterior window frames and even the ceilings. Rather than flat, steel, rectangular frames, bladed frames separate windows and ceiling tiles in a nod to the cross-shaped posts. An opaque variation on the office's green glass windows is found on the stairs and floor of the company's design library, which surveys the structure from a loft. "This is timeless architecture," says Brett Ewing, AIA, president of Marnell Architecture. "It has a contemporary, clean, slick feel that will last a long time. It's not trendy."

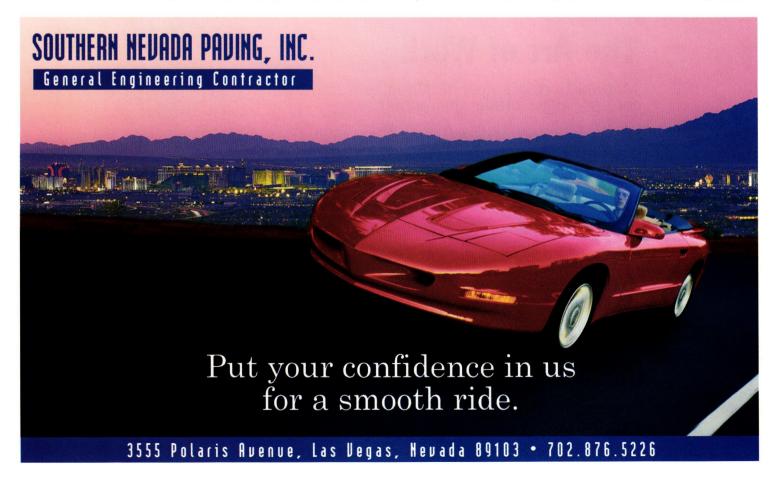
"People say it's like working in a college study hall," Schnepf says. "It's very open and very formal, but very relaxed. It's quiet but open. There's a lot of light, and it's airy and very functional." Ewing adds that since moving to the building, productivity among the company's 90 associates has risen 15 to 18 percent.

"It's a no-brainer that environment affects your psychology, and psychology affects the way you do your job,"

says Lumpkin, who hopes Marnell Corrao's efforts will inspire local developers and architects to rethink office design. "You realize these people care about what they do, and they care about their employees. If this building encourages thoughtful design, it could make Las Vegas one of those outstanding places that appeals to a more educated, sophisticated type of resident. There are cities that just accidentally grow and have wonderful architecture—the architecture comes together and creates an attractive place. You look around off the Strip and you can't see that Las Vegas has, to this point, built itself up as a lovely place to live. I think it could turn into that. I see this building as a sign of Las Vegas' maturity."

It's also just the opening statement of a 30-acre, 400,000-square-foot office park Marnell Corrao is developing. Construction is under way on a 70,000-square-foot building that will house Tririga, Marnell Corrao's technology subsidiary. At three stories, the Tririga building, with its undulating facade, departs significantly from the design of Marnell Corrao's headquarters. But it includes the green glass and metal finishes of its predecessor—characteristics that every building in the office park will share. They want each to have "an abundance of light and fabulous view opportunities of McCarran and the Strip," Schnepf says.

The park's master plan also deviates from the standard Vegas vernacular. "We had a lot of discussion early on regarding what kind of work environment we wanted to create," Schnepf says. "We wanted to develop a place,



rather than just another building on the side of the road. We wanted a lot of open space and places for people." To give life to that vision, Marnell Corrao is clustering office buildings around a central park with a gazebo and areas to sit and eat lunch. Landscaping will surround parking lots to soften the acres of asphalt that overwhelm most Valley office parks. And landscaped, meandering walking trails will connect buildings, the central park and the center's premier amenity, Panevino, an Italian restaurant Marnell opened in December (see Page 33).

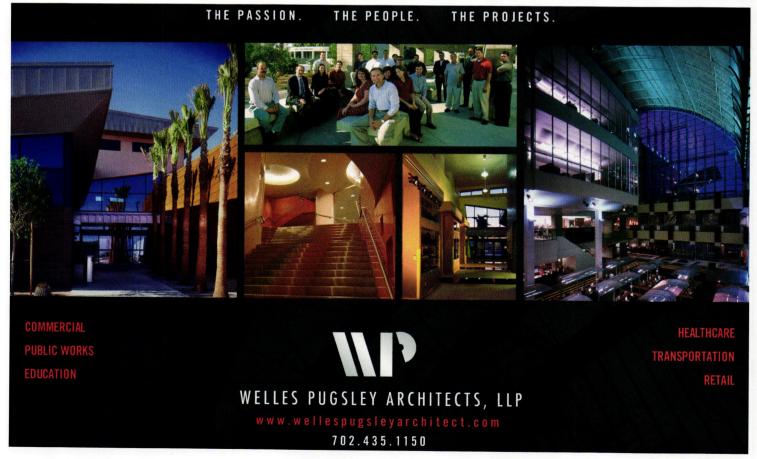
Marnell Corrao is also designing the office park with a keen high-tech sensibility. The floors in its headquarters enable quick reconfiguration of underlying wiring and cabling. Employees work on wireless laptops, taking them into meetings to call up documents and e-mails. The main conference room has preset lighting and a massive screen for videoconferencing. The screen converts into a giant computer monitor operated by a wireless keyboard. In addition, Schnepf says the company is "rolling out some interesting thoughts on building and property management systems that are very tenant friendly." One idea is an electronic system allowing tenants to notify management immediately of a problem, and receive instant verification of the issue as well as a scheduled repair date.

Will local companies follow the lead? Marnell Corrao hasn't marketed to the brokerage or development communities yet—company officials wanted to finish work on their headquarters and the Tririga building first. Schnepf

wouldn't disclose the headquarters' cost or the office park's lease rates, but he did call those rates "very competitive." When Marnell Corrao execs start to market the office center, they will do so from a multimedia conference room they're building on site just for the purpose. But Lumpkin believes once the rest of the market sees what Marnell Corrao has planned—and what it has already accomplished with its headquarters—they'll leave with a distinct impression. "It's a breath of fresh air," she says, "and it could change the city's reputation."

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The Language of the Desert

Thanks to a healthy dose of restrictions. The Ridges in Summerlin makes space for a new Las Vegas vernacular

Adios, Mediterranean. Adieu, French cottage.

Arrivederci, Tuscan.

The Howard Hughes Corporation, with the blessing of county planners, is challenging the creativity of local architects and their home-owner clients, pushing and tugging Las Vegas into contemporary residential desertappropriate architecture.

Summerlin's new village, The Ridges, in the foothills hard against Red Rock Canyon, has a set of criteria outlawing many of the architectural styles that dominated Las Vegas residential architecture in the 1980s and '90s. The call is for strong horizontal lines and earth tones against the desert and mountain backdrop; the use of stone, masonry and glass in multiple yet restrained massings so that buildings blend better with nature; and wide eaves and deep window recesses as an antidote to the desert heat.

The preferred resulting style, with a tip of the hat to the old Prairie Schoolers, may be called "Desert Contemporary." But some creations may be just plain contemporary. "Howard Hughes is changing the whole view," says local architect Bob Sherman. "Each of the custom homes here will have a different architectural response to the standards." And while the desert contemporary style may be seen in scattered locations in the Valley, only in The Ridges is it a requirement for an entire community, and only there is typical Vegas/Southern California style ruled out.

Gerald Robbins, vice president of detail planning for Hughes, is largely responsible for the concepts. The move was inspired by the development's topography and based on research in northern Scottsdale and the country clubs of Palm Desert. "We had some hesitancy about these requirements," Robbins says. "It was risky, but the land demanded it. We wondered, 'Would they be embraced?""

At the west end of Desert Inn Road, with Jack Nicklaus' Bear's Best Las Vegas winding through it. The Ridges will include 14 neighborhoods and 1,000 dwellings. The development will be walled and accessible by only two gates. The pronounced ridge lines in the foothills provide views of the Valley to the east and the Spring Mountains behind. No streetlights, no sidewalks and (through negotiations with the Postal Service) no cluster mailboxes.

The Ridges' Arrowhead neighborhood with its 25 half-acre custom sites is under way. The Topaz Ridge neighborhood's production housing is being built by William Lyon Homes. Both areas meet The Ridges' base criteria. Behind an inner gate is the Promontory neighborhood, with 54 half-acre sites priced between \$400,000 and \$950,000—all sold and in various stages of design and construction. Across a ravine and through yet another inner gate at 3,200 feet is the about-to-be released Promontory Pointe, with 13 sites from a halfacre to nearly five, and land prices expected to be \$1.5 million and up. And as the air gets thinner, the criteria get thicker.

The lot sizes can be misleading. At Promontory they tend toward rectangular and have been graded, but at the Pointe they are wildly divergent. In both cases the developable area within each lot is specified by a strict envelope set by Hughes to protect the natural topography. Even within the envelope, all cuts and fills are tightly regulated. Setbacks are jogged to promote a diverse streetscape, and height restrictions vary to reduce massing and better blend the home into the hillside.

Landscaping requirements are rigorous, with turf limitations and specified palettes for trees, shrubs and ground covers—including the banishment of tall palms or columnar trees that might promote verticality, and requiring shade trees in the front and rear yards. The

Story by Christopher Hagen



Shown above and on the previous page are renderings of "community appropriate" prototypes from the Promontory Pointe design guidelines.

Pointe has three designated zones: the private area, which must meet the plant palette; a transitional zone, which may be used during construction but must be revegetated; and the native zone, which must remain undisturbed.

Working within these parameters, the designers of homes for Promontory and Promontory Pointe also must address building restrictions such as:

- A ban on specific styles that promote verticality. At Promontory Pointe, "multiple massing" is required, meaning that elevations of the house must be broken into multiple wall planes, roof planes and floor heights.
 - A maximum building height of 30 feet.

- The color palette is restricted to "earth tones" no white is permitted, and reflectivity should be low. (Promontory Pointe's palette is more restrictive and darker.)
- A prescribed color palette for roof tiles, though tile style may vary. At Promontory Pointe, no barrel or "S" roof tiles are allowed.
- A maximum of three garages facing the street, with a four-foot offset between garage doors.

Robbins says there was initial resistance to the design standards, especially among the spec custom home designers and builders. "Now," he says, "many architects are relishing the idea and rising to the occasion." Bing Hu with H&S International in Scottsdale is designing a home for local builder Robert Lewis. And locals are catching the wave—Robbins mentions Marc Lemoine, Perlman Architects and Pinnacle Architectural Studio as active in Promontory.

The standards are challenging, Sherman says, but it's a good challenge. "They are forcing real architecture. The restrictions, ironically, force you into creativity." He points out the firm commitment to the envelope concept and horizontal design: "You cannot have a second story straight up. Any vertical elements must be terraced back. And the oddshaped envelopes force you to push and shove walls out."

Sherman has drawn homes for Scottsdale, a couple in Promontory, and now Hughes has asked him to do a concept home for the Pointe. The chosen lot, steeply sloped



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in multiple directions, is being fitted with a 10,000-square-foot habitation stair-stepped up the hill in three separate pavilions linked by outdoor corridors or glassed galleries allowing the natural landscape to flow through. Unique topographical features of the lot include a rock outcropping, which is incorporated within the home. The roof of metal, or slate, has a very low pitch (3:12) and 48-inch overhangs. Cut caliche slabs "as big as a desk," blend with native stone to form the walls. Heavy boulders at the base settle into the landscape, then become smaller as the walls rise. Stucco elements are dressed in Sienna and other dull native colors, and deeply recessed windows complete the walls.

Clients often have particular design elements in mind, and Sherman says the criteria do make it more difficult to work with them. Roger Pettiford, sales and marketing manager for Summerlin's custom lot sales, sees a mixed reaction. He tells of one couple who came in with a plan for a Mediterranean dream home and was turned down. "But," he says, "another couple had a lot at Southern Highlands, and they kept trying to get them into a Tuscan style. They finally came here, and it was exactly what they were looking for."

Pettiford says a large number of knowledgeable people in the real estate business are building at The Ridges. "There's a competition developing as to who can create the most unique home," he says. "The new houses keep raising the bar. And the design review committee meet-

ings are getting more and more interesting. You get a more sophisticated buyer with an appreciation of architecture that others don't have."

The design ground rules at The Ridges have combined with the natural setting to create a buzz among Valley home-seekers. If the idea turns out to be a hit, will the desert-appropriate architecture seen there be exclusive to Southern Nevada's well-to-do enclaves, or will the new style filter down to more moderately priced neighborhoods?

Sherman is optimistic: "There are some really talented architects here, and many small firms are rising to the occasion." He recalls moving to Las Vegas 12 years ago when every design was so-called Mediterranean. This style, he says, faded five years ago, and now its replacement, Tuscan, has been overworked. "These were designed originally for custom homes and then repeated in the merchant-built homes, such as Christopher," he says. He sees a new direction in the more contemporary, with signs of this at Anthem, MacDonald Highlands and Southern Highlands, as well as in the requirements of The Ridges. "They are becoming more restrained, incorporating the outdoors. The timing is right for this, and we may see the merchant-built homes moving this direction also." "I

Christopher Hagen, a free-lance writer, is a regular contributor to Las Vegas Life and Architecture Las Vegas.





Straw Huts Before the Wolf

Five architects and historians discuss the buildings they would most like to see survive Las Vegas' appetite for destruction



Edited by Greg Blake Miller

Photos by James D. McGlasson Last April, an organization called Preserve Nevada, which is affiliated with the UNLV Public History Program and the National Trust for Historic Preservation, published a list of Nevada's 11 most endangered historical sites. Number Three on the list was the Moulin Rouge, which opened in 1955 as a place where black performers and patrons could make themselves at home during the city's Jim Crow era. In May, the casino burned down. Seldom do we lament the loss of a Las Vegas landmark, but the Moulin Rouge was a rare case. Other endangered sites—some threatened by progress, others by decaymay not have quite so prominent a place in the city's social history, but they may benefit from the heightened sense of urgency among preservationists that followed the fire. For example, the downtown railroad cottages—along with the Moulin Rouge, the only Las Vegas structures on the Preserve Nevada list—have attracted increasing attention as imperiled structures from the city's earliest days. Architecture Las Vegas asked five historians and architects to weigh in on

some of the city's other historical treasures, indispensable buildings in the disposable city

The Victory Hotel and Golden Gate Hotel

Bob Stoldal, vice president of news, Channel 8; chairman of the City of Las Vegas Historic Preservation Commission; chairman of the Nevada State Museum; vice chairman of Preserve Nevada

Other than the few remaining railroad cottages, there are only two structures built during Las Vegas' railroad era that still exist. The first is the Victory Hotel on the 300 block of South Main Street. Opened on August 6, 1910, as the Lincoln Hotel, it is a two-story building with a canopy from the first floor extended over the sidewalk—a common sight in old Las Vegas, and the Victory's example is the last of its kind. The building was noted at the time for its elegance, comfort and convenience. But perhaps the main reason the hotel has survived for 93 years is location, which has kept the Victory out of range of decades of business development and change—forgotten and thus spared

from the wrecking ball. The second treasure from the railroad era is the Golden Gate, on Fremont and Main. Construction on the hotel, restaurant and saloon (with a few games of chance, too) began within weeks of the May 15, 1905, Las Vegas land auction. It opened in January 1906 as the Hotel Nevada and still stands behind neon and a few coats of paint. And as you stand in front of the Golden Gate today, you are not only standing in front of Las Vegas' oldest hotel, but on its first concrete sidewalk.

The Las Vegas Downtown Post Office

Janet White, associate AIA; assistant professor, architectural history, UNLV School of Architecture

One of the few "monumental" historic buildings we have in Las Vegas—and one with real architectural significance—is the old post office on Stewart Avenue. This Beaux-arts classical building was built from 1931-33, when the Depression-era federal government was pouring resources into projects around the country (including Hoover Dam). It served as the post office and the federal courthouse. With its arches and columns, the building did what the government intended its buildings to do in those days: announce itself as the most important place in town. Listed on the National Registry of Historic Places and now owned by the city, various suggestions have been made for its re-use. Whatever use they find for it, the old post office gets my vote as being worth preserving—just as it is.

El Cortez

Alan Hess, author of Viva Las Vegas: After Hours Architecture

A rare, intact piece of early history proclaiming Las Vegas' discovery by outsiders as a gambling mecca, El Cortez is one of the city's most notable old structures. Stretching a full block, the hotel-casino opened in 1941 with sophisticated Spanish Colonial-style architecture, far more stylish than the older storefront sawdust joints a few blocks west on Fremont Street. The composition is informal but picturesque. Red-tiled roofs ornamented with chimneys cover irregular gables and a rotunda, topped by a classic skeleton sign with an elegant script type face. Rustic weeping mortar oozes artfully from the brick walls, and an arcade shades the west side. A 1946 remodel by architect Wayne McAllister (the L'Enfant of Las Vegas) added the elegantly modernized bezeled display cases around the ground floor. Though its East Fremont site now puts it on Downtown's fringe, El Cortez represents an era when Las Vegas readied itself for the growth and glamour to come on the Strip.

The Downtown LDS Church

Dr. Robert Fielden, NCARB, FAIA, principal with RAFI Inc.

We have a tendency in the Valley to regard tomorrow as good and yesterday as bad; consequently, most of our

significant architectural contributions no longer stand. It's a little known fact that many of the earlier "good" buildings were constructed of a reinforced adobe manufactured here from the clays near the river. Of the old remaining "good" buildings, the LDS Church on Ninth and Clark (now the Family History Center) is an example of a well-designed, well-crafted structure that should be protected from demolition. The Norman structure, built in the 1920s or '30s, is simply constructed of concrete bricks and stucco, with an asphalted shingle roof. It has matured gracefully, and the patina of age has enhanced its character. I hope I age as elegantly.

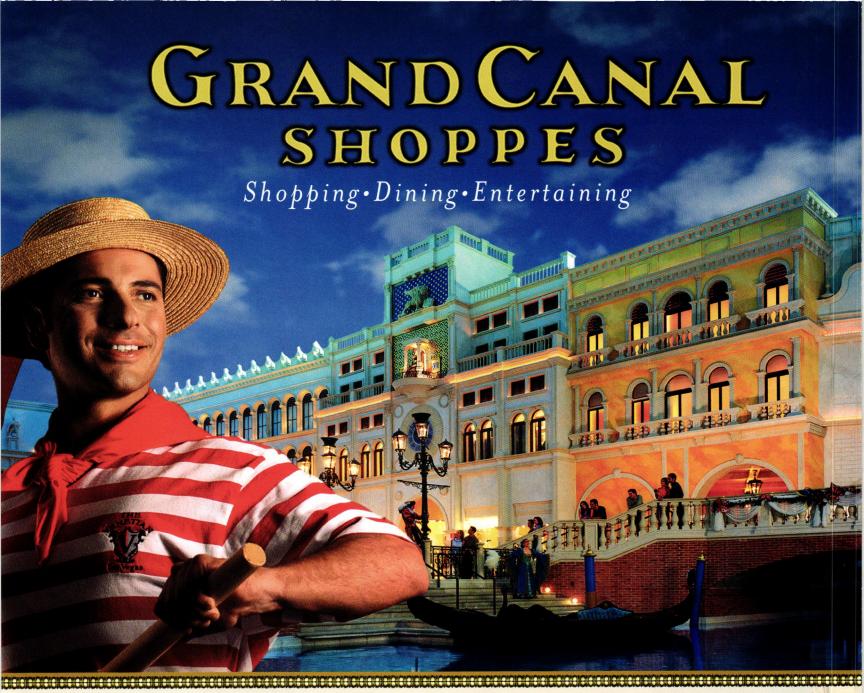
La Concha

Roger Thomas, executive vice president, Wynn Design and Development

As Las Vegas' only building designed by the prominent Los Angeles-based black architect Paul Williams, the La Concha Motel office on the Strip would be first on my list of structures to preserve. Williams was famous for combining Georgian elegance with Hollywood glamour and modernism; in doing so, he created a whole new vernacular. La Concha, built in 1962, is his most futuristic work. It captures the best of the Rat Pack era better than any other Las Vegas building, and it's the Strip's most exuberant and "googiest" structure. There are fantastic curves and shadows; the building is unique in that it uses sunlight rather than neon for drama. It's the most memorable arch on the Strip and the most iconic. It truly says "resort"—you can expect to be far from daily life when there. Williams' sense of drama, his fearlessness, is inspiring. I'm sure people told him that it couldn't be built; I've had the same experience. But if you can build La Concha, you can build anything. That's always in the back of my mind when I'm designing. 4

OPPOSITE PAGE: A couple of old Downtown beauties: the post office, top, and the LDS Church. Below stands the Strip's most exuberant structure, La Concha-but for how long?





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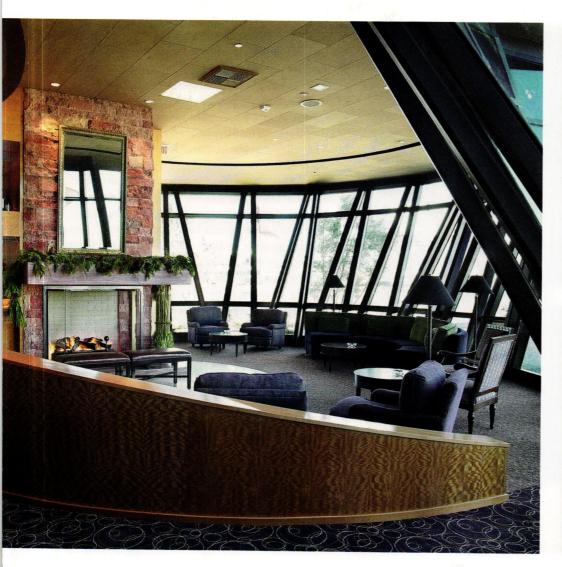
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Building an Appetite

Three off-Strip restaurants dared to put design on the front burner. To what degree does it matter?

Despite the success of fancy restaurants in the

newer casinos—often clones of successful eateries in other cities—the idea of high-priced, adventurous dining beyond the Strip has struggled to take root. That is, until this year, when three new high-style eateries sprung up in suburbia. Situated well beyond the tourist corridor, they are relying heavily on their design as much as their menus to attract an affluent crowd.

Across the country, design, primarily on the interior, is a recognized factor in creating the requisite drama—the decade-old trend of the open kitchen is a paean to this—or the intimacy diners supposedly require. What is unusual about the off-Strip high-end restaurant phenomenon is that they are making a statement with their exteriors as well. They feel duty bound to do so since all

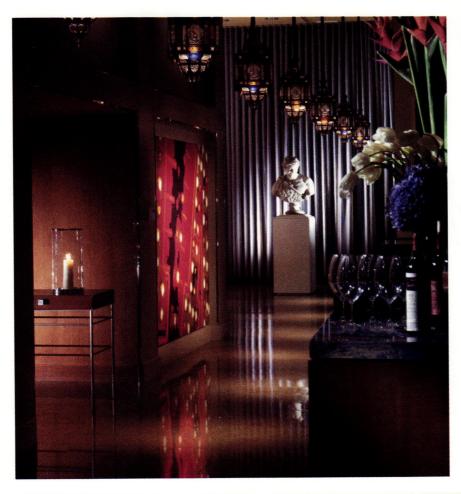
three buildings are on sites that traditionally house more stereotypical daytime businesses.

Tre, the Maccioni family's new eatery at Fashion Village at Boca Park (1050 South Rampart Boulevard) has as its immediate neighbor Nevada First Bank, with Waffelicious and the M.J. Christensen Diamond Center not 50 yards away. Sedona, just above the Flamingo off-ramp of Interstate 215, occupies a site often reserved for gas stations. Panevino, meanwhile, sits on the edge of a commercial industrial park along Sunset Road (see Page 23), across from McCarran International Airport.

Sedona, the most recent of the three to open, has

Grand entrances (clockwise from left): Panevino's scenic lounge, Tre's reservation desk, and the way into Sedona's dining room.

Story by David Hay



emerged as the most ambitious response to staking out an iconic presence. The multipurpose bar and eatery is the brainchild of Adam Corrigan, an entrepreneur expanding beyond his Roadrunner chain. Designed by Rick Sellers, AIA, and Michael DelGatto of Carpenter Sellers Associates, the section on the west side of the restaurant—seen by drivers heading southeast on 215—is a tilting, modular form that, clad with rustyred, steel plates, could well resemble a futuristic armadillo. The inspiration for this unusual structure, according to DelGatto, was the nearby Red Rock mountains. Sedona's front and eastern sections are only slightly more conventional: high, dark sky blue, stucco walls that support a roofline angling skyward. Flaming torches, adding further excitement, top the exposed, tilting, steel columns that are features of these facades. Even when surrounded by a high wall, designed for privacy, the imaginativeness of the structure remains eyecatching.

Tre, designed by architect John Burke, also relies heavily on an angled form. Its giant windows tilt outward to meet an overhanging roof. But these gestures fail to diminish its commercial "box" structure, one that melds all too well with its more pedestrian neighbors in the mall. (The bank next door opts for a similarly angled form, even though a different architect designed it.) When I visited, only the word "Tre" was affixed to the exterior, prompting some passers-by to drop in and ask



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what exactly was being sold here. (Could this have had something to do with Tre's failure to draw a lunchtime crowd?) Just recently, the Maccionis added the word "ristorante" to the signage.

Panevino is the least ambitious in terms of its exterior. Its southern entrance blends in with its neighbors in the industrial estate, and its signature front window is not immediately obvious to those speeding by along Sunset in their cars.

But like restaurants everywhere, it is the interior design that establishes atmosphere and embellishes the actual dining experience. (This usually does not mean the inclusion of large television screens. In the new Las Vegas eateries, these are still seen as vital to filling in any gaps in the dining experience.)

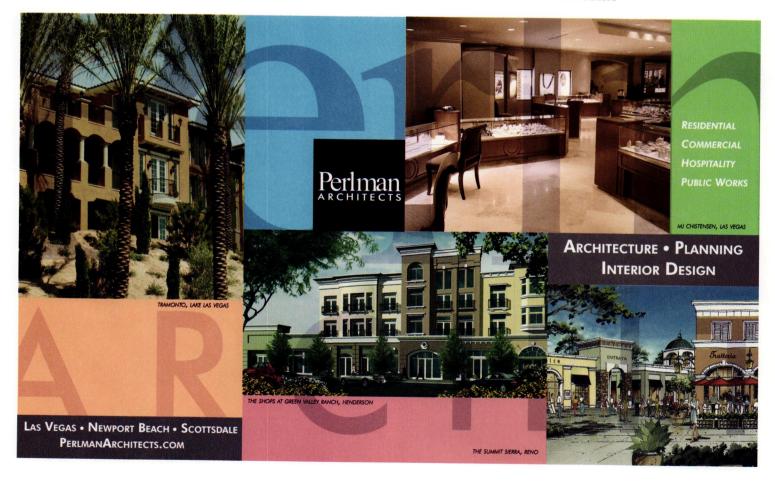
The Maccionis, with proven records at Le Cirque and Circo—both in New York and Las Vegas—chose Todd-Avery Lenahan (see Page 40) to design the dining spaces at Tre. Lenahan ignored the architectural dictates of Burke's angled structure. The latter called out for a more severe modern interior that Lenahan saw as having little relation to the cultural traditions showcased on Tre's Mediterranean menu. Instead he created a dense collage of design elements that draws from modern, Moroccan and Old Italian traditions. Upholstered wall hangings, made of fabrics from the Rubelli mills outside Venice, and window drapes that hang straight down remove any idea that the windows tilt out.

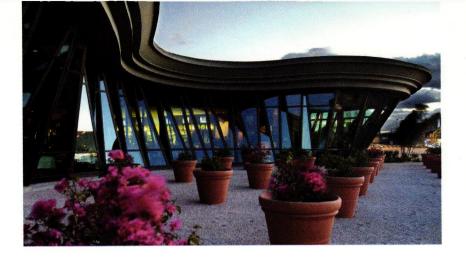


A well-conceived amassing of detail is reflected, for instance, in the shape of the dining chairs reminiscent of art moderne furniture at its best: comfortable, solid but with pizzazz. The stiletto legs on the banquets turn these restaurant standards into furniture that is graceful, even light. The North African touches—the camel-bone chest that serves as a front desk and a row of lanterns between the bar and eating areas—add a sense of cultured, rather than kitsch, foreign exotica.

Certain elements such as the oversized chandeliers

At Tre (opposite page), the dense collage of design elements draws from modern, Moroccan and Old Italian traditions. Angles are the rule at Sedona, from front (above) to back.





The sweeping signature window of Panevino (above), the Moroccan-inspired bar and lounge at Tre, and the outside patio at Sedona (opposite page).

are overemphatic, but the final result is subtle, rich and highly varied—the type of adjectives Tre's owners hope will be applied to their menu.

Panevino reflects a more corporate design sensibility. Pre-construction surveys showed that more than two million square feet of office space would lie within a twomile radius of the eatery. And nearby neighborhoods would supply additional customers eager to celebrate anniversaries and birthdays in some place other than a casino. Thus, Panevino-catering to executives at lunch and families in the evening-opted for an ambience reminiscent of a contemporary country club.

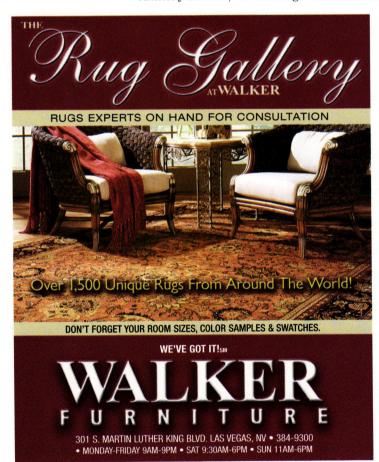
The other significant factor motivating the design decisions was the site, which, at night in particular, offers a spectacular view of the Strip. To show this off, Anthony Marnell, the building's owner and architect,

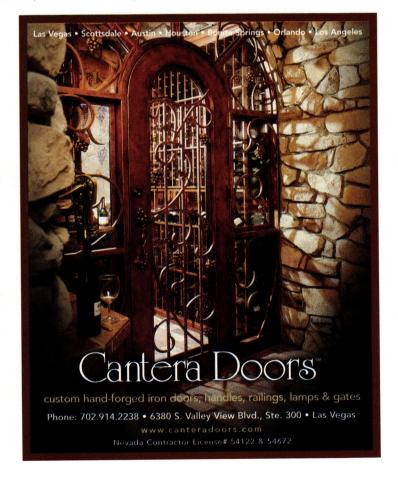


designed a floor-to-ceiling window curving in and around the entire airport frontage of the eatery. The curves ensured that the sun's rays—high in summer, lower in winter—would spill gently into the restaurant year-round. The window ended up requiring many angled steel columns. The result is an unfortunate heavy latticework that acts as a barrier to the view that was to be the restaurant's signature.

Nonetheless, the designers artfully followed the curving motif of this window throughout the restaurant. Semicircular, wood-paneled divides surround the private dining area. Large banquets are also half circles. In the ceiling, a curving, wooden panel separates a higher ceiling near the window from a lower one toward the rear.

At Sedona, nothing is held back, reflecting its owner's desire to appeal to many age groups at different times in





one evening. Carpenter Sellers thus created a number of different spaces inside.

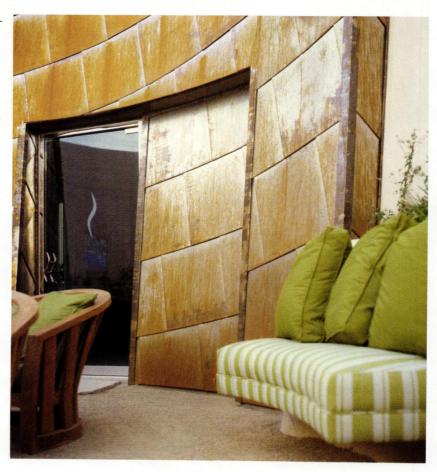
Lower ceilings—under the tilting rooflines so striking on the exterior—help establish more intimate eating areas, away from the cacophony of the bar. Even more cozy is the enclosed VIP room, a 350-square-foot, trapezoidal shape that opens up to an open-air, circular, high-walled patio. The latter's signature feature is a water pool with still more flames erupting from its center.

Being in Sedona is somewhat akin to walking around under a large, circus tent, with different "acts" being performed under a variety of angled tilted ceilings.

At time of writing, Sedona had just opened and so there is little evidence that its high-flying design would be successful. Tre, despite the care and imagination displayed by Todd-Avery Lenahan, had yet to find a regular audience. At Panevino, however, the carefully calibrated design responses to its initial surveys were immediately bearing fruit. After four months, with no advertising, its operators, who have leased the space from Marnell Corrao Associates, were already declaring the eatery a success.

Does this mean that imaginative but highly idiosyncratic design is, in fact, an overrated draw for potential diners in Las Vegas? Especially off the Strip? If so, that will be a disappointment.

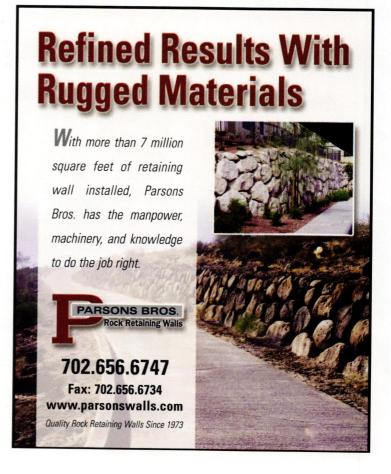
David Hay is a New York-based playwright and journalist who writes about art and architecture for The New York Times, Architectural Record and Dwell.



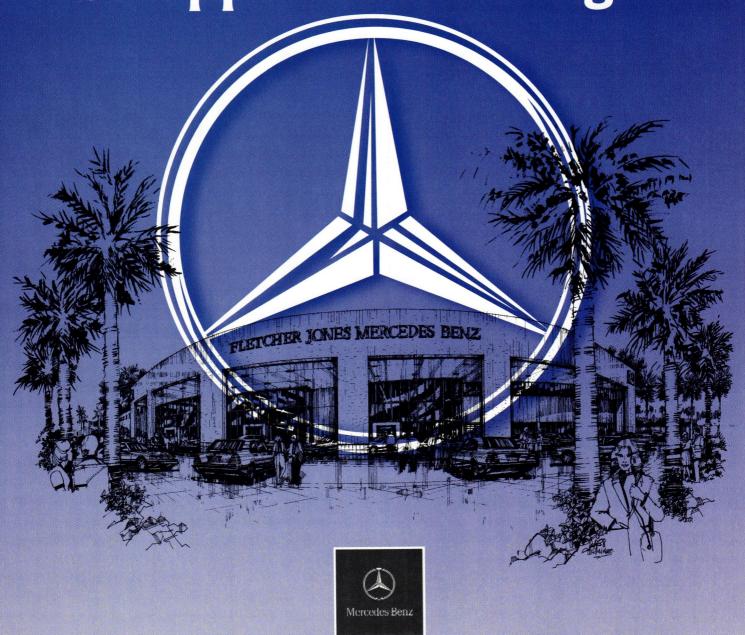
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Fletcher Jones Imports brings beauty and elegance to its new home in Las Vegas

hen the new Fletcher Jones Imports automotive dealership opens in the middle of September, it will be perhaps the finest automotive dealership in the world. The new home of Mercedes-Benz in Las Vegas sits on almost 7 acres of land and offers 205,000 square feet of showroom, administration and service and meeting areas. The total cost to build the facility including land, when completed will cost nearly \$30,000,000.

The Fletcher Jones family of dealerships have been a part of the Las Vegas valley since the early 60's. starting with Fletcher Jones Chevrolet back in 1963. Today, Fletcher Jones operates stores in Las Vegas, Reno, Newport Beach and Chicago. With three Mercedes stores-Mercedes of Chicago, Fletcher Jones Mercedes in Newport Beach and Fletcher Jones Imports in Las Vegas, Fletcher Jones sells more Mercedes-Benz automobiles than any other dealer in the United States.

There are many features that make the new store amongst the most unique car dealerships in the world. For starters, when visitors enter the new car showroom, they are surrounded by 160,000 square feet of stunning stone flooring imported directly from Italy. This look of

off with a stately Pomele wood paneling, a fine wood from the Mahogany family, which was imported from Brazil. The paneling caries a distinct consistency as one wonders throughout the dealership for a car buying experience like none other.

Another extraordinary distinct addition to the new care store is the inclusion of a Maybach design area. Mercedes-Benz just unveiled its new Maybach 62, a revival of the German limousine of the 1920's. boasting a sticker price of \$353,000. Fletcher Jones Imports will feature a special Maybach center, where customers can select their very own Maybach. Mercedes estimates that a thousand of these vehicles will be sold worldwide. 400 of them in the U.S.

Coffee bars will be found throughout the dealership, along with several plasma TV's, a shoe shine area and a full time manicurist. The store will offer free car washes to its customers, manned by the Las Vegas division of Opportunity Village. The store will double its capacity in service offering a total of 54 service bays. A child play area will keep kids busy viewing videos or playing video games, while parents shop or get their automobile serviced. Fletcher Jones Imports will have the largest indoor showroom area in the Southwest, including a basement area offering

additional

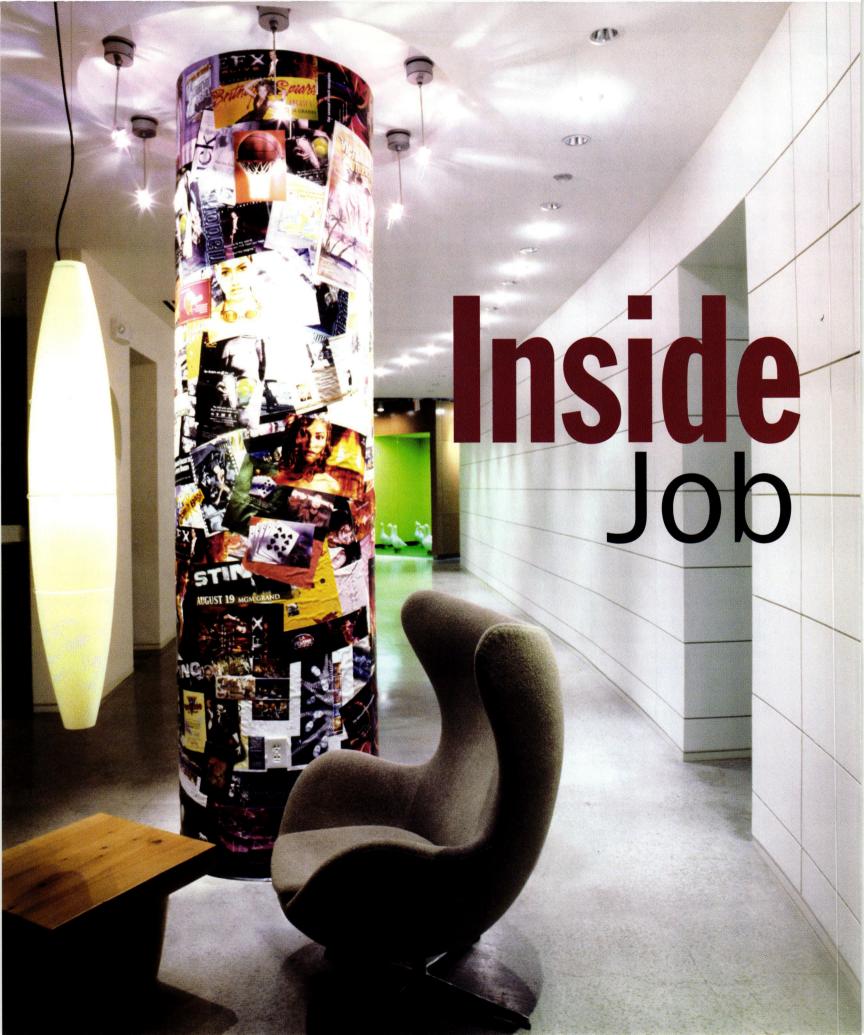
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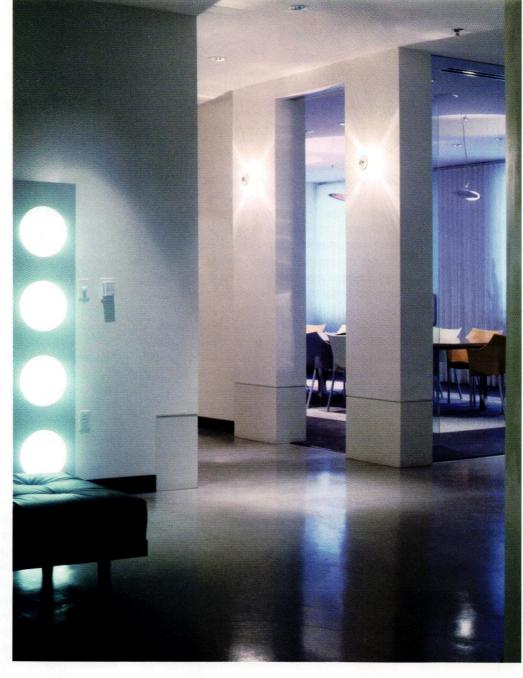
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The wild and worldly bunch at Avery Brooks & Associates has served notice that good Vegas design can be done in Vegas

By Amy Schmidt Photos by Joseph Pickett III



As we make our way through the catacombs, stepping gingerly over displaced stones and overturned buckets, careful not to stir the spirits who at one time surely inhabited this place, it feels a bit like we're on the back lot of some old Hollywood movie set-Vincent Price in The Haunted Palace.

We're inside the eerily silent Caesars Magical Empire to tour the 16,000 square feet of space that may soon be transformed into the Strip's newest nightclub. I'm tagging along with Todd-Avery Lenahan and Kimberly Trueba, president and managing principal of Avery Brooks & Associates (ABA), respectively, who have been hired to work their particular brand of magic—interior design—in the abandoned space. They were invited here by a high-profile nightclub entrepreneur, the latest addition to a growing list of local developers savvy enough to tap into the talent Lenahan and Trueba have assem-

"Your space will be the antithesis of this," Lenahan says to our host (whose identity, like many of ABA's current projects, is on the q.t.) as we walk from one of the private dining chambers into the cavernous kitchen—the center of the space where the nightclub would be

"John Schadler needed a new spaceship to take him to the moon and beyond," says Todd-Avery Lenahan of the spirited, contemporary office space he designed for Schadler Kramer Group, opposite page and above. Pictured at right are Lenahan and his Avery Brooks & Associates design partner, Kimberly Trueba.



"We are very picky people," says Steve Wynn, "and Todd is holding his own against some of the best designers in the world. We're lucky to have him in Las Vegas."

constructed. His eyes dart around the space, likely envisioning a pulsating crowd of beautiful people writhing on an ABA-designed dance floor.

The two men first met in December at the opening of Tre, the Maccioni family's ABA-designed restaurant in Boca Park. It wasn't the restaurant's plush interior decor that impressed the firm's newest client, rather it was 36-year-old Lenahan's passion for design. "Anyone can build a large space and play loud music," he says, "but it takes a certain energy to design something everyone can have a good time in." Specifically, an ABA level of energy.

Since this is Lenahan and Trueba's first look inside, we meander through the remaining spaces—the haunted Sanctum Secorum, and Chinese Pagoda and Sultan's Palace theaters. Seems a shame to not hold off on construction just long enough to throw one helluva Halloween bash, the group jokes, but Las Vegas waits for no one.

After pausing to comment on "the Rolls Royce of dimming systems" in the lobby of one of the theaters, as well as the egregious amount of money spent on the enormous statue set into the wall in the main room (Lenahan likens it to hanging a Lexus convertible on the wall), he says, "Nowhere else in this industry does someone spend millions of dollars on a project that they crumple up and throw away within 10 years—unbelievable."

Until the master plan for the rest of the expansion is in place, though, there is little they can do. "We need to understand our neighbors and entrances and so forth," Lenahan says. Therefore the consensus after 20 minutes of grappling our way around in the dark is



that they need to return to walk the space with plans in hand. Caesars will have standards that need to be met, and the two companies need to start dialoguing now. That's where the developer comes in.

Like ABA's handful of other local clients—the Maccionis, Steve and Elaine Wynn, Marc and Jane Schorr, Larry Ruvo—this particular client has been sold. He now has to convince Caesars that this particular interior design firm is the *only* firm in Las Vegas—perhaps, in the world—for the job.

Which, in Las Vegas, is easier said than done. Often, it's not even said—until now.

"My biggest criticism of developers in this market is that they often seek outside designers from New York, LA or San Francisco to bring cachet to a project, because in the past, Las Vegas had no base for strong interiors of an international quality," Lenahan says. "The Four Seasons, Ritz-Carlton, St. Julien—big luxury brands—come to us to do their work in other regions. But people here feel that once you're local, you're somehow less interesting."

Well, not everyone. While Avery Brooks & Associates—an outgrowth of Anita Brooks & Associates, a design firm with a 30-year tradition in this city—has spent the majority of the past five years concentrating on projects in other markets (the St. Julien Hotel in Boulder, Colorado, the Four Seasons Resort Great Exuma at Emerald Bay in the Bahamas), they've started to make an impact in their own back yard—the restaurant, a boutique (Meital Grantz's Talulah G), a medical center (Thomas & Mack).

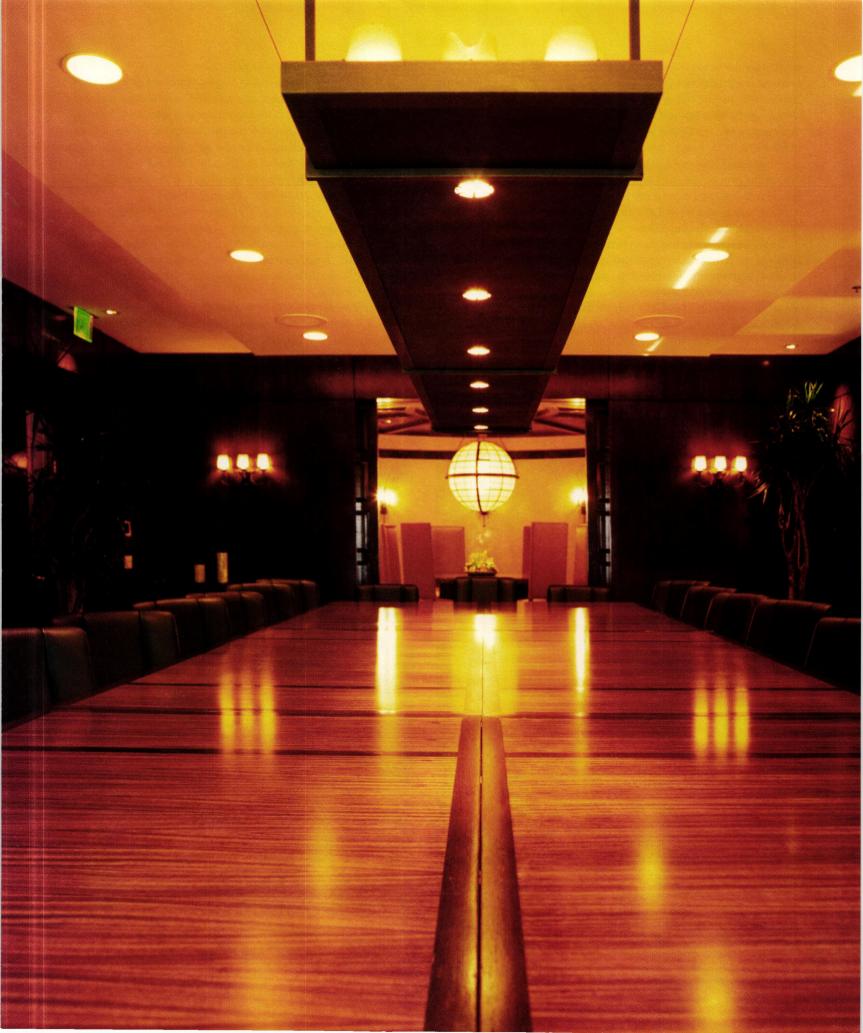
"We wanted the new company to be nationally established right away, and frankly I knew more about the international market than I did about the Las Vegas market," Lenahan admits. "I would have had to have done it anyway, because while the market here can be very robust, it's also cyclical." So in order to level out that natural ebb and flow of business, he went after a broader portfolio of clients.

During the first two years, ABA bid for jobs against the top two design firms in the world exclusively, each of which had a minimum of 300 employees and offices in several countries: Hirsch Bedner ("which created hotel design as an industry," Lenahan says) and Wilson & Associates. Industry bible Interior Design magazine ranked ABA the fastest growing design firm in the country in 2001.

"Then we started to do more projects here," Lenahan says. "And those have been with the smartest, most savvy people in this market." The handful of people who recognize international-caliber talent when it's at their doorstep—and its value.

Both protégés of Disney Imagineering, Lenahan and Trueba were often called upon to recruit and cultivate new talent for the company, firms such as Anita Brooks & Associates. In fact, they were crucial in landing Anita Brooks & Associates its first big job outside Las Vegas: Disney's Animal Kingdom Lodge in Lake Buena Vista, Florida. Trueba

The design for the tasting room (left) and board room at Larry Ruvo's Southern Wine & Spirits was inspired by the work of Ricardo Legorreta—the internationally acclaimed architect whom Ruvo admires and whom Lenahan happened to study under at the University of Texas at Austin.



"The Disney job put a lot of pressure on Anita," Trueba recalls. "She really needed the right type of management in place to tackle jobs of that size. So I hired a few people and set up guidelines for documentation, and when Todd came on board a month later [early '99], we took it to the finish line."

It was a challenging time both personally and professionally for Lenahan and Trueba (she continued to commute from Denver and became pregnant with her first child within a year), who felt they needed to establish themselves as their own force. Brooks stayed on for just a year. "Anita reached a point in her career where she wasn't concluding something so much as she was moving on to things in her life that had taken on greater value to her—her family, her grandkids,

church, community service," Lenahan says.

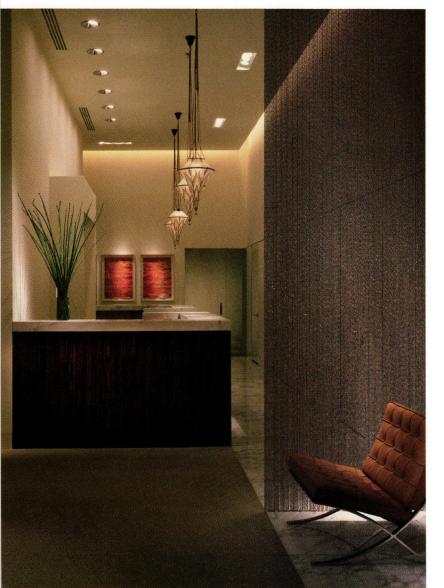
None of Brooks' clients—all in Vegas—remained. It was a risky move. "It really was too optimistic and idealistic to think that those older clients were going to be a fit for the new company," Lenahan says. The only part of the old company that remained was the legacy of the name. But Lenahan and Trueba were hungry, hopeful and they often shared with the staff their vision for the future of ABA: to become the most progressive creative force in the hospitality design industry—not only in Las Vegas, but in the world.

"Some people freaked out," Trueba recalls, "and other people were like, 'Wow, this is going to be so cool, I want to be part of it."

"The fact that they are brilliant is a common denominator among all of the staff," Lenahan adds. "It's what I expect from everybody we bring here. What distinguishes designers at ABA is their integrity, loyalty and character."

Zia Hansen, for example, a revered architect in her native Denmark who moved to LA 15 years ago because she found European architecture too limiting. She later transferred to Las Vegas when

"I always think of Todd as a designer, whereas a lot of the profession I find to be decorators" says Roger Thomas. "He has a very exciting sense of design."





The lobby at Avery Brooks & Associates (left) evokes visions of Lenahan's personal taste, including the Barcelona chair, a piece he's coveted since he was 12 years old. The private Park Avenue-ish residence Lenahan designed in Las Vegas shows a more classic side.

Yates-Silverman relocated its offices here, and followed that with a four-year stint as an assistant professor at UNLV.

When she would talk to pal Michael Collins about his position at ABA, he would go on about how much he loved it. Hansen soon found herself asking Collins for an introduction. "I missed designing," she says. "UNLV wouldn't let me practice more than eight hours a week.

"It was the first time I met somebody who had that kind of passion," says Hansen, now a director at ABA. "Todd's approach to architecture is very contemporary and experimental. The projects here are very diversified, and we work with clients who expect a very high level of design."

I first met Todd in November, while working on a story about

the Maccionis' bold new venture, Tre. Owners Lauren and Mario Maccioni hired ABA to design a Strip-elegant restaurant on the west side, the sort of place where the Maccionis' level of service and sophistication would resonate with the decor, yet still be cozy enough to be thought of as a neighborhood eatery (see Page 33).

On the day we met, Lenahan was busy giving the wait staff lessons in how to properly fluff the pillows on the banquettes that line each of the restaurant's three rooms. He was gracious and articulate. He gave me a tour of the design highlights and heightened my interest in the process. So I made an appointment to visit him in his offices on Pilot Road. After touring ABA's sleek, contemporary and minimalistic office space, I understood why Mario Maccioni, also after seeing it for the first time, knew this was the design firm for the job.

Lenahan grew up in Europe and Asia before his designing mother and military father settled in Washington, D.C. He saw much of the world by the time he was 14; the rest by the time he was 21. He received his architecture degree from the University of Texas at Austin and started out on the design team at Gensler & Associates Architects in D.C., working for Fortune 500 companies. Yet he yearned to do something the populace would feed off of. So in 1991, he took a position with Disney. Six years later, he was principal for design and interior architecture for Walt Disney Imagineering at its corporate headquarters in Southern California. Lenahan was responsible for crafting spaces and places all over the world, including EuroDisney in Paris and Tokyo DisneySea in Japan—the last project he had full authorship of before becoming principal. The experience was rich, but something was missing.

What he saw in Las Vegas was "so different than everything I was exposed to growing up—monumental government buildings and cathedrals—I just saw casino work as the most liberating type of design you can do."

So he moved here, partnered with Trueba and in no time found himself plying his trade anywhere and everywhere—except in the city he now calls home.

Trueba studied architecture at Kansas State. Mom was an artist, dad an architect. She worked for her father, principal of his own firm, on holidays and summer vacations throughout school. Particular about being labeled the boss's daughter, she did all the things no one else wanted to. "I organized the library, ran drawings, did errands."

In college, she landed a couple of free-lance jobs. Kansas State hired her to oversee the redevelopment of the student union. A retirement community asked her to do some conceptual work for an expansion and renovation. Then in 1990, she interned with Disney Development and was soon hired on full time. She met Todd the following year. The

two sat next to each other for nearly 10 years, but didn't work on the same projects until 1997 when Lenahan was promoted to principal. They encouraged one another through each other's projects. "We were interested in what each other did, and we learned from it," Trueba says. "I knew that if I ever left Disney, one of the people I wanted to work with was Todd."

In 1999, that's exactly what happened. Because they knew each other so well, Trueba believed that in order for their new company to flourish, Lenahan needed to be designing. So she took over as much ownership as she could of the day-to-day operations. "I'm a good editor; Todd's a good designer."

It was the perfect complement. While Trueba took care of managing the business, Lenahan forged lasting relationships with some of this city's most influential movers and shakers by wowing them with his design ideals. "Designers often arrive at a solution too fast," Lenahan says. "There are architects whom I work with in this market, whom I have wonderful relationships with, who have told me on more than one occasion, 'Todd, your approach to design is totally different from ours. We build casinos. Our objective is to make a lot of money. We are not building the Washington Monument or the Arc de Triomphe.' So [they] don't need to be anthropologists and get all esoteric and all artistic, but I do. Because, ultimately, that's what people respond to."

He was also wowing some of the city's most talented architects. It's one of the reasons Hansen came to work here. "Here it's all about exceeding your wildest expectations," she says. "The wilder, the better. I was brought up with less is more, but less can be a bore as well.

"In Europe I was very limited as to what they would allow me to do; that's why I felt I had to leave. I was winning awards, and I knew exactly what they wanted. I could go for a third prize in a competition and do something that was more me, but if I wanted to win a first prize, I knew exactly how to do it."

Nearly every designer on staff takes an interest in all aspects of the company—producing documentation and designing, selecting furniture, finishes, artwork and accessories, as well as detailing, conceptualizing and rendering. The majority of the staff is trained architecturally—in fact, Hansen is a member of AIA and Lenahan is an allied member. The remaining staff is trained with a focus on interiors—color, materials and the acquisition of furniture, fixtures and equipment.

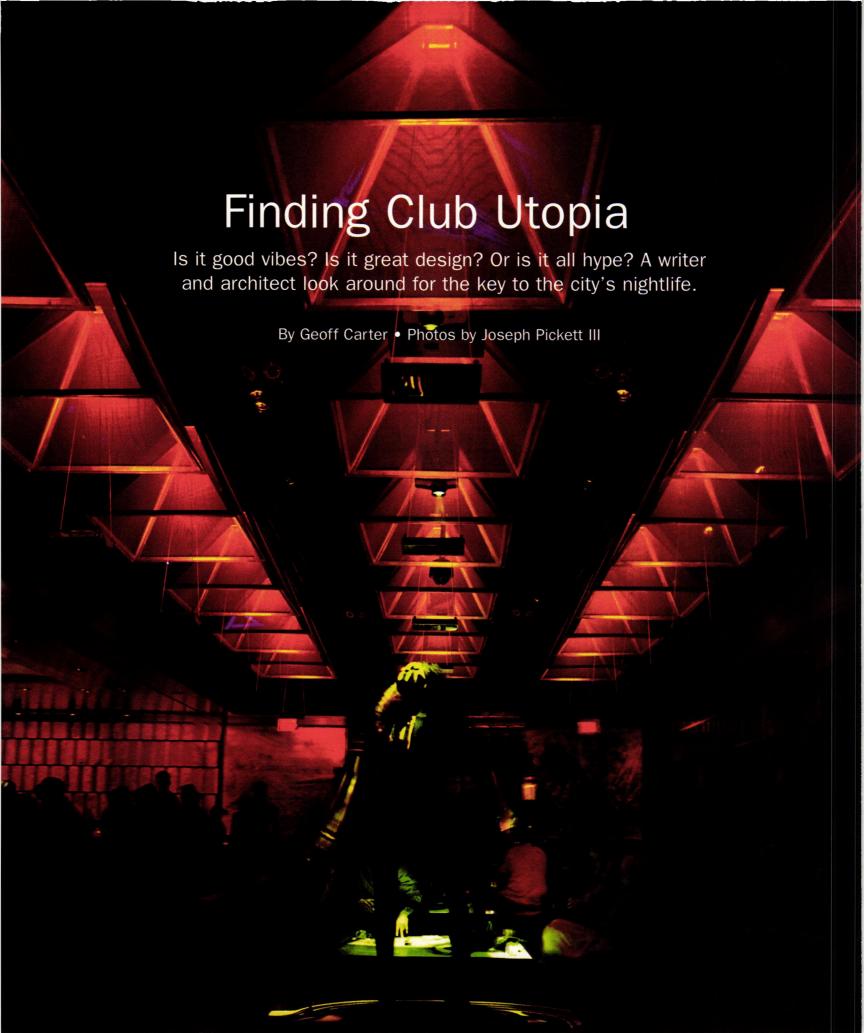
"No one on our staff is purely a decorator," Trueba says. "We take a holistic approach to design. We talk first about function, flow, where things should be adjacent to one another. The last thing we do is select furnishings and fabric and color."

ABA's first work on the Strip will be for Wynn Las Vegas.

They are one of very few local design firms attached to the project. Lenahan and ABA have been given a huge deal of responsibility: three restaurants, including the buffet, and the executive offices.

"We are very picky people," says Steve Wynn, "and Todd is holding his own against some of the best designers in the world—Jacques Garcia, Naomi Leff, Jeffrey Beers. We're lucky to have him in Las Vegas."

"One of the things we knew we wanted to do with this project is nothing that's been done before," says Roger Thomas, executive vice president of Wynn Design and Development. "And one of the things I really love about Todd is that he doesn't fall back on what's worked before. He is always looking to push himself. And because everything is done in such a methodical and logical way, it (Continued on 74)



When I began frequenting Club Utopia in the mid '90s, I have to admit that I didn't give much thought to its design. The former Metz looked like every big-city rave I'd seen in Mixmag: dark, cavernous, multileveled, dominated by large screens showing endless loops of visual gibberish and packed three-deep in sweaty humanity. For the most part, my memories of Utopia are largely gin-based and too racy for a publication without a centerfold.

It was some months before I realized that the place had an outdoor patio upstairs. Being at the end of a strip mall, the club doesn't directly overlook Las Vegas Boulevard, but the MGM Grand and Monte Carlo loom so closely overhead that you hardly notice, and dancing on that patio was like dancing in the middle of the Strip. For the first time since I moved to Las Vegas in 1990, I felt like I was part of a metropolis, and that patio was the exact center of the universe.

A feeling that strong rarely happens by accident. The DJ had to be playing the right beats, the crowd had to be friendly, and somewhere along the line, the designer of the space had to realize that an outdoor patio was a great idea.

Back then, Utopia was pretty much the only game in town, unless you favored Club Rio, the Beach or the Palladium, which no one I knew did. (Gipsy was as popular then as it is now, but the gay discotheque has always skated around trends and always will.) Today, Vegas.com lists more than 30 nightclubs and lounges, nearly

all of them in hotel-casinos within two miles of Utopia. Not surprisingly, Utopia is "temporarily closed."

In a field as competitive as Vegas nightlife, there are only so many weapons in the arsenal. Location is important, but seeing as most of our nightclubs have addresses on one of the best-known streets in the world, it's hardly a guarantee. And I've yet to see a hotel nightclub aggressively market itself to locals from opening day-that's the kind of thing they do only when the grass starts growing beneath their dance floor.

All other options exhausted, club owners have made this a design war. I'm loath to say who fired the first shot-after all, I may want to score another line pass someday—but you can see the battle lines for yourself. Luxor, the MGM Grand and the Hard Rock spent millions on Ra, Studio 54 and Baby's, respectively, and all three became passé well inside of five years. Jack's Velvet Lounge closed its doors at the Venetian; Venus, also at the Venetian, radically revamped its operating style; Utopia drifts in and out of our dimension.

Even Michael Morton and Scott DeGraff, now riding high with Ghostbar and Rain in the Desert, had to watch their first Vegas venture, Drink and Eat Too, die a prolonged death as fickle Vegas crowds went elsewhere. It's an ugly fight, and the only way to win is to keep looking good.



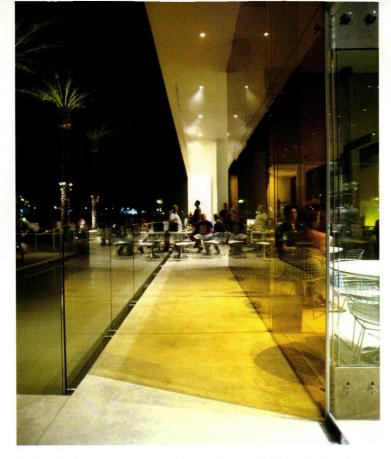


One Friday night, I invited Eric Strain, founder and principal

architect of Assemblage Studio, out to the killing fields. I'd heard from a friend that Eric considered the nightclub design war among Vegas' most exciting developments, and within five minutes of meeting him it was obvious we liked the same stuff. He appreciates Mandalay Bay's "restaurant row" ("Design-wise, people are still chasing Mandalay Bay"), likes the Venetian's still-hip V Bar ("It's more intimate. ... The design caters to allowing for more intimate conversations with the ones you came with") and, most importantly, he loves the notion of a club or restaurant interfacing with the Strip. "That's why I love Mon Ami Gabi," he said of the steak house at Paris. "You're right there on the street. If I were designing a club, that's where I would start: bring the street and the club together. The activity of the Las Vegas Strip is like nowhere else; it shouldn't be left out."

We began our tour of duty at Whiskey Bar in Green Valley Ranch Station. I admired my favorite element of the Michael Czysz-

Tabu (opposite page) has a lot to offer, including concrete platforms with projected images that ripple to the touch, but ultimately its whole is greater than the sum of its parts. And while James Bond would feel at home at Whiskey Bar (above), the clash of '60s-style furnishings and wood paneling can, after a while, lead to sensory overload.



designed club: the enormous white staircase that dominates the eastern end of the room, and the way it pushes you toward the '60s-modern fireplace and sofas at the western end. Czysz was reportedly inspired by Ken Adams' set design for the early James Bond movies in designing Whiskey Bar. The conceit works, at first—with its '60's-style modern decor and giant doors, it feels like a Bond villain's subterranean headquarters—but the darkness of the room becomes fatiguing after 20 minutes or so. Its predominantly brown color scheme sucks the color out of the patrons and wait staff, and its furnishings don't quite jibe with its wood paneling—just imagine how odd a Vernor Panton chair would have looked behind the roll-top desk in your grandfather's study.

Eric and I both prefer Czysz's other creation for Green Valley Ranch, the Drop Bar, though it is merely a bar. Its white couches and chairs, steel bead curtains and outer ring of high-definition television monitors evoke the cautionary science-fiction films of the late 1960s—a big plus in my book. (Hi-def televisions don't always agree with me; the vibe of Peppermill's Fireside Lounge was utterly destroyed with the addition of them.) If Whiskey Bar is the shadow, the Drop Bar is the sun.

"Vegas is still about the darkness, with lighting effects working best under black skies," Eric said. "While clubs around the country have adopted a more light environment where older crowds are desired. Vegas is still about youth, even if you are a fortysomething and from the Midwest. For the Vegas crowd, it's more about being in a dark space where you can almost hide yourself, change your personality, maybe do things you don't want everybody in the place to see."

On the way out, we walked outside and admired the Ranch's pool area. On most nights, the party inside Whiskey Bar moves outside. With the lights of Las Vegas as a backdrop and the warm, insulating desert sky overhead, you couldn't ask for a more glamorous venue. Even James Bond could love it.

Next flashpoint: Tabu at the MGM Grand. Eric and I had a

reservation, which allowed us to bypass the velvet rope. Still a strange sight, a velvet rope in Vegas, where the atmosphere is traditionally more inclusive than exclusive. That's what happens when your town becomes a proving range for LA's weekend warriors. In any case, Eric and I ran hot and cold on Tabu. As designed by Jeffrey Beers, Tabu is a strange mix of eye-popping innovation and underdone ideas. The concrete platforms, with images projected upon them that ripple to the "touch," are the coolest things I've ever seen in a club, and the marble-slab bar is lovely.

Yet the quality flags in places you wouldn't expect. "The wall that separates the VIP room from the main room is Plexiglas, or some kind of plastic with a red tint," Eric said. "It gives the illusion of high-end design, but incorporates relatively cheap materials." We also scratched our heads at a mural on the club's dominant wall: It's a fine mural, but seems ill-matched to Tabu, where even the bottles behind the bar are accented with colored lights and placed in long, clear tubes that turn slowly.

And then there was that matter of Tabu's bathrooms, which are, um, spectacular. "I felt like they'd almost blown the whole wad in the men's room and didn't have any money left to build the club," Eric said after we left. "Those fixtures they used in the rest room, the stainless-steel urinals—they're not cheap. The tile, the stainless-steel counters, the lighting—all big bucks, and big design, spent in the rest room.

"China Grill has the best bathrooms in town—those glass boxes but at least you can experience them as you walk around the restaurant. Tabu's are hidden. If they're gonna spend that kind of money, they should go with the European model of unisex bathrooms, so everyone can hang out together."

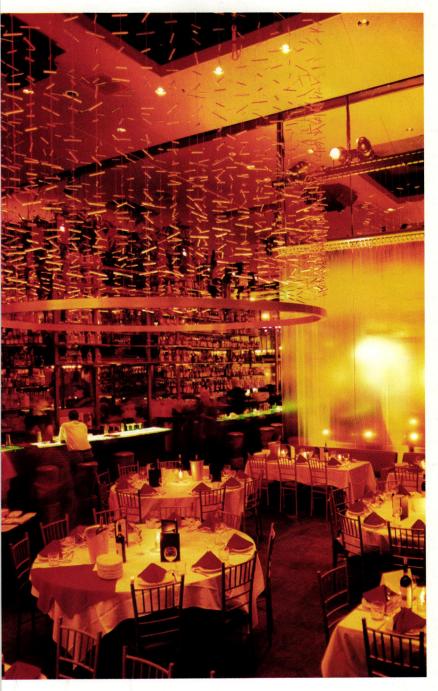
Eric compared Tabu with his favorite Vegas club: Rumjungle at Mandalay Bay. "Rumjungle's design explores textures—the front wall of water and fire, the mesh chains in the back, the tortoise-shell walls. Even its bathrooms, similar to Tabu, are about designing the experience. The materials used in building it seem much more honest to what they are."

The club seems much more honest to its environment, too. Rumjungle is an open book: Unlike Tabu, essentially a fancy box with a mixed quality of goods inside, Rumjungle is as good as it looks from the outside. Before you begin waiting in the long line to get in, you can look through the wall of flame and water and see what you're going to get—crowds huddled around the bar, go-go dancers wriggling on the platforms. Redecoration isn't necessary; the constantly changing face of its crowd is Rumjungle's true façade. Every weekend you could peek into the club and it will look different from the previous week.

Later, when I read the materials on Tabu, I found out that Jeffrey Beers had also designed Rumjungle. If we'd known that at the time, we might have been too shocked and amazed to elbow our way through the crowd gathered at Tabu's velvet rope. We might have gone right on to the Palms.

In Vegas' great nightclub design war of the 21st century, each establishment packs a secret weapon. In the case of Whiskey Bar (this page), it's the sultry Whiskey Beach and its view of the Strip. At Tabu (opposite), it's a marble-slab bar behind which bottles rotate in clear tubes that are accented with colored lights.







The Palms' casino floor could be a suburban mall. It has a friendly, modern feel—if Jerde International Partnership placed a right angle anywhere on the casino floor, I'll be damned if I know where it is-but George Maloof could remove the slot machines and line the room with Gap and Sharper Image franchises without so much as changing a light bulb. It's a clever trick. The bland, inoffensive look of the casino keeps gamblers happy and gently urges the

party crowd into its clubs and lounges: Little Buddha, the cavernous

Rain and Ghostbar.

Like Tabu, Ghostbar embodies the newest and most baffling trend in nightclubs: It's a dance club without a dance floor. Bathed in blue light, this 55th-floor lounge—designed by DeGraff, a co-owner of the bar with Morton—is a marvel of understatement: virtually nothing about Ghostbar's design sticks with you, save its spectacular view and the Plexiglas floor on the outdoor patio. (Unfortunately, the floor is directly over the high-powered spotlights used to illuminate the hotel at night, and the Vertigo-style freakout is somewhat diminished by

Rain, a multilayered discotheque that boasts fire and water effects in addition to standard club lighting, is also a fine-looking room, but hardly unique. (As a matter of fact, with its elevated VIP rooms and balconies surrounding the dance floor, Rain reminds me of Utopiaand, to a lesser degree, of the tall drink of water that was the Venetian's C2K.)

Eric never got to see Ghostbar or Rain. The lines for these clubs are always long, and even if you have a reservation—which we did there's still a long wait to actually get in; Ghostbar is only reachable by elevator, and Rain is often packed to near capacity. I'd like to say that good design brings the crowds, but I know that's not true: Morton and DeGraff know how to make a room look better than it is through carefully orchestrated hype—a piece in Playboy here, an appearance by Leonardo DiCaprio there.

The two impresarios could have kept Rain and Ghostbar hopping for the next five years even if George Maloof hadn't convinced MTV to shoot The Real World in his resort. But Maloof did, and thousands line up monthly to slice off a piece of that notoriety. This is the essence of nightclubbing—it isn't strictly about dancing or drinking or being seen or meeting partners, but elements of all these things. Ghostbar and Rain could have been design-free concrete-and-stucco rooms and DeGraff, Morton and Maloof could still bring in the crowds by angling the hype in such a way that clubbers would know they were guaranteed loud music, a specialty martini in each hand and a date on each arm.

Eric noted the mobile bar set up between the lines for Rain and Ghostbar and chuckled. "I bet you'd have a lot more fun waiting in line for these places than actually getting into them," he said.

"Maybe we'll find out sometime," I said. And with that, we left the Palms for the Rio, and Bikinis.

I can't recall the last time I was more depressed by a nightclub than when I spent 20 minutes poking around Bikinis. The room was

The designs at Rumjungle (this page) and Risque (opposite) are about as dichotomous as you can get, yet both work well in their given spaces. The former is true to its name, with a lot of emphasis on flash (such as a front wall of fire and water), while the latter scores points with a bright, inviting layout—not to mention a pastry bar.

supposed to blend Vegas glitz with the playfulness of Miami Beach, but if such design elements existed, neither Eric nor I could detect them. Most of Bikinis' charm is in its half-dressed staff, which I suppose is all right, but even so, the dank, fraternity house-like ambience of the place is only inviting to college-age patrons. And there was casino carpeting on the floor. I'm one of those freaks who loves the gaudiness of casino carpeting-I'd wear a suit patterned like it, if one was made—but it has no place inside a club.

Not that any of this mattered. The line for Ghostbar aside, Bikinis was the most bustling club we visited that night. Like Ghostbar, Bikinis has created a towering reputation around itself that the actual room doesn't come close to supporting. More than any other club in town, Bikinis embodies what non-clubbers imagine when they think of discos: dark, vaguely sinful rooms packed with lithe-bodied people who will make them feel bad about having had dessert last week.

Later, when Eric and I discussed what we'd seen, I asked him how important a good room is to having a good time. "You know, as an architect, I want to say that it's the most important thing—but having done those nightclubs, I'm not sure. In talking to [manager Michael Cornthwaite] at Risque, he said that design is really only important to get people in there the first time. Once you're in the club, it's really more about the staff than the design of the room. It's not really what I wanted to hear as a designer, but it's probably close to the truth. It's not design, but the feeling of exclusivity that makes a place."

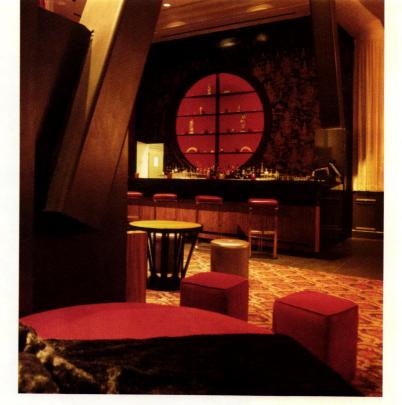
After Bikinis, we lost the third member of our party—the silent partner who had been buying all the drinks. Twenty minutes inside Bikinis had worn him down. Undeterred, Eric and I went on to Risque at Paris Las Vegas.

"Of all the clubs we looked at," Eric said later, "Risque was probably the most appealing. The other clubs we saw had a very dark kind of atmosphere, and Risque was much more bright, with white being the dominant theme. It just felt more inviting than the other clubs. A lot of these places are following the pattern created by the old discotheques, in which the lighting is what gives the place its flavor, but Risque was just the opposite; it was really about the environment and seeing the experience of others."

And the pastry bar. Risque has a pastry bar. For this reason alone, it was the best club I saw that night—but it had much more to offer. The club's design, a coup d'etat by Kovacs & Associates (partnered with the local firm Youngblood Wucherer and Sparer), favors texture over flash and makes an asset of what could have been a massive liability: The beams that support the roof of the casino, and the swimming pool on that roof, angle gracefully and seem to hook into sockets on the ceiling.

Risque's Asian-flavored VIP room is terrific, its multileveled main room gives a constantly changing feel and—true to management's word—the club's staff is courteous and outgoing above and beyond the call of duty. But for all this, what impressed Eric and I most was what made Club Utopia for me: Risque's west wall has balconies that open onto the street. You know, that street.

We looked out over the Strip, soaking up the view. (Risque offers a fantastic view of Bellagio's fountains.) Eric wondered aloud how wonderful it would be "if the club opened even more, so even the dance floor overlooks the Strip," and I thought of how good it once felt to be on Utopia's patio, dancing to the city beat.





Fitfully, our tour of duty ended there. But the following day, I was lucky enough to see a secret weapon being developed. The former Drink and Eat Too space is being reshaped into ICE, set to open later this year. Those who remember every square inch of DeGraff and Morton's former club will scarcely recognize ICE; the interior building has been re-imagined in such an ingenious way that memories of the club's former incarnation will be wiped clean.

Gone are Drink's multiple bars and convoluted layout. In its place, patrons will find a club that can become as big as its crowd demands: new rooms can be opened up as the night goes on, until the big floor—Drink's former courtyard—is opened. Imagine a seashell with a dance floor at its center. In the design and hospitality war that is Las Vegas' club scene, ICE is truly the next thing.

Until the new next thing, whatever or wherever that may be. 4

Geoff Carter, a former Las Vegan now based in Seattle, writes a pop culture column for the Las Vegas Weekly, and contributes to Playboy.com and travel guides by Time Out and Fodors.

Nouveau Wegas



A conversation with Charles Gruwell on the meaning of the Icehouse. Is there something beyond the cool? By Phil Hagen

On the outside, it's South Beach with a twist. Inside, on the first

floor, the café is light and googie. Up the stairs, the retro lounge is chic and mysterious. Everywhere, Old Vegas covers the walls. What does it all add up to? The Icehouse, yes. Something different Downtown, for sure. But, sitting at a dining table downstairs in the sunlight, looking out at the little moat between the building and sidewalk, then around at the vibrant mix of colors and materials, I feel something else, too. Something a little deeper, a little more meaningful. A Vegas Vegas motif maybe? A style all our own? Or maybe it's all a dream. It is rather foggy in here ...

Wait, that is fog, and it's coming from the corner by the floating stairway. A few uniformed techs from some party company are demonstrating their fog machine for Charles Gruwell, who's had it up to here with the results. They just can't get the dry-ice effect down. Literally. The fog is rising much higher than he's envisioned for the Icehouse's grand-opening gala. In fact, Gruwell can't bear to look at them right now. He's seated across from me, ready to talk about this place that he's spent the last 18 months designing, and what it's really all about.

Which first requires a quick history lesson. The owners are Dr. John Crofts, a retired oncologist from Florida, and Jan Miller, who owns a tavern on Boulder Highway called Heiney's. I ask Gruwell how a guy like him and the owner of a blue-collar joint ended up with a place like this. He tells me that Miller is his neighbor, and one day she came up to him mentioning that she and her partner had purchased an old bar Downtown called Red-Eye Jacks. They wanted to remodel it ...

The fog has been rolling behind him, now it stops. He turns around. "They're blowing my mind," he says. "It's the third time they've been here. I've told them I don't want it too smoky, I need to see how high the fog comes ..."

They had it going a second ago, I tell him. "It was about this high." "It was? That's not what I want. I want it way down here. I've got to see it all happen before I approve it."

And so ... Red-Eye Jacks was an old bar the partners wanted to remodel, but it was in such disrepair that Gruwell thought they ought to rip it down and start over. And once that was agreed to, the Icehouse went from a fancy remodel to a full-blown \$3.5 million soupto-nuts mission. That's a lot of trust in your designer. But Gruwell is a bit more qualified than most neighbors.

He moved here from Los Angeles in 1996 to be Anita Brooks' design director for the Four Seasons and Mandalay Bay projects. And he stayed on when the firm became Avery Brooks & Associates, working closely with Todd-Avery Lenahan (see Page 40). Two years ago, he launched Charles Gruwell Design, and his recent projects have ranged from redoing the suites at Silverton for Klai Juba to designing the interior of Gavin Maloof's homes here and in Sacramento. For the Icehouse, he collaborated with fellow interior designer Jordan Banares, with whom he's worked off and on for 10 years. Nonetheless, the two-story building at 650 South Main Street, in the shadow of the Clark County Government Center, seems to stand—no matter who contributed to it—as one vision. And I wonder if, amid the fog and the fog-machine trauma, Gruwell sees what I see in that.

I understand you had a hand in just about everything.

"We created the concept, exterior, all the massing, all the interior details, everything. We went to Westar of Las Vegas and brought all kinds of sketches. The lead architect was Paul Heretakis, and everything we did was in collaboration with them. They structure-engi-



neered it and did exactly what we wanted, but they had some good suggestions and a level of design input."

Who came up with the theme?

"Jan told me there used to be two icehouses on this site. One was torn down, the other burned down. It used to make ice for Las Vegas and the Southern Pacific Railroad. So she said, "We want to call the pub that.' I said, 'I don't think pub sounds right with Icehouse.' But they told me they wanted it to be related to the icehouse that used to be here. And that's all they told me. So Jordan and I started thinking of the formula: Vegas, icehouse, hot, cold. And we thought, My god, what's hot? ... Well, Miami, South Beach ... and we started bouncing off. Why Miami?

"I like the whole feeling of South Beach. When we looked at the building, it made us think art deco, and so therefore the art-deco influence of all the buildings in South Beach. We developed all these connotations about South Beach and art deco-mosaic tiles, whimsical furniture, lots of light. This isn't art deco, but it's inspired by that."

Two very similar places as far as being hot and touristy—South Beach and the Strip. How did you refer to the Vegas environment when your mind was thinking South Beach? Or didn't you?

"We didn't want to do Las Vegas—not the architecture—because it was going to come back in the meaning of the interior. We wanted to have it be this fun, art-deco, South Beach-inspired place, because of this connotation of freshness and airiness and openness, so why not import that idea, like they do everything else in Vegas? Like Paris, Bellagio, Treasure Island. Why not bring South Beach to Vegas? Then, once we settled in on the look of the architecture, my mind started going to, *Hmm*, now that we have this

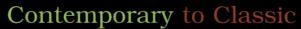
Light touches: Gruwell showcases the Icehouse's art-deco flourishes outside at night, a la South Beach, and strategically placed a hint of 24/7 neon inside the googie café.











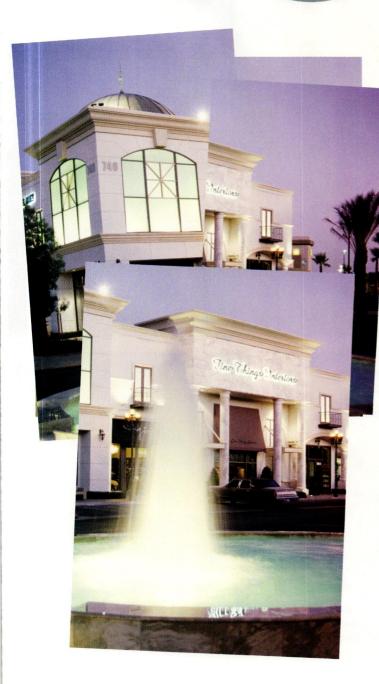




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tailoring How three very different shopping centers are adapting their designs to the Valley's expanding and maturing consumer environment By Jennifer Robison / Photos by Patrick Wirtz



Each season, economists pore over numbers from retailers to assess the mood of the nation, and we hear how that impacts us. But there is an important consumer phenomenon that happens at the local level, too. "Part of the social fabric of our society is consumerism." says Steve Carpenter, AIA, a partner in Carpenter Sellers Architects. "Good retail

design should at least enhance and at best encourage the interactions that go along with that."

But not too many Las Vegas shopping centers deliver on that mission. Most are rambling expanses of pale, squat buildings, fronted by broad swaths of asphalt parking lot. Few have common areas for lingering and communing; they invite only a quick dash inside—long enough to run into a store, complete an errand and get back to the car.

Glimmers of groundbreaking retail design do exist, but primarily on the Strip, which can afford to be innovative with 36 million potential customers a year. The rest of the Valley has only 1.5 million people. But as markets grow, we'll catch up to the trends in Southern California, where developers and architects are building centers combining residential, retail and office space into a comprehensive, compact living environment that encourages people to ditch their cars and walk for a change. Already, two Valley projects on the drawing boards propose that lifestyle. The Howard Hughes Corporation is planning a regional shopping center, a hotel-casino, a Class A office park and high-density homes—all linked via walking trails—in its Summerlin Centre. And American Nevada Company is building The Shops at Green Valley Ranch, a series of upscale stores and luxury apartments adjacent to Green Valley Ranch Station and the Henderson Promenade performing arts center.

Though locals have experienced the unfulfilled promise of cuttingedge retail design before, designers agree we're about to have our moment. "We are catching up quickly," Carpenter says, "because of the area's rapid growth and the number of people moving here who have experienced interesting and relevant architecture in other regions. We are very vibrant."

As retail design evolves here, existing properties must change to stay relevant themselves. Here, Architecture Las Vegas profiles three properties that offer lessons in adaptation and hints that reveal the future of our retail life. "It's kind of like when Steve Wynn develops a new hotel—it sets the notch a little higher," says Gary Congdon, AIA, a principal of Lee & Sakahara Architects. "Every retail development does that. Architects and developers are trying hard to earn people's business."

The Boulevard Mall: A model of reinvention

It was Nevada's first indoor mall when developer Irwin Molasky opened it in 1967, and in many ways, the Boulevard remains the grande dame of Valley shopping centers. The surrounding neighborhood continues to change. Once an upscale enclave surrounding the Las Vegas Country Club, it began to tire two decades ago. Today, it's home to hotbeds of renewal—the John S. Park and McNeil Estates neighborhoods-and new high-end condominiums. Through it all, the Boulevard has been a constant, changing subtly with the neighborhood.

Part of the Boulevard's enduring success has come from maintaining a mix of trendy national retailers, all of which have brought a modern appeal and interior aesthetic, says Bob Fielden. FAIA, of RAFI. But the center's last major redesign 11 years ago was also key to the mall's sustained relevance. "They did a really good job of providing a redesign that has managed to stay current," says Curt Carlson, AIA, director of design at Swisher & Hall, who, as a nearby resident, has been a keen observer. "They brought in a lot of natural light, upgraded the finishes on the floors and ceilings, and they enhanced the main entry points." The redesign also passed on trendy elements that could have dated it.

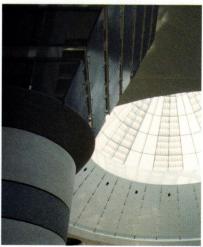
Yet, the local market has changed radically since the Boulevard's makeover, and a fresh crop of major malls is competing for suburban shoppers-meaning it's time for another face-lift. The Boulevard's interior has been more successful than its exterior at shedding its outmoded, '60sera look, Carlson says. He thinks the mall could boost its fortunes simply by adding "a little more identity" to its main entrances—perhaps some color and additional landscaping. "Some of the great, big facades tend to be faceless and somewhat expressionless," concurs another local designer. "The Boulevard needs some scale. Large, imposing structures that suck you in from a sea of parking don't really create a shopping experience that people want."

What people want from their malls is entertainment. "The Boulevard is going to have to compete with Fashion Show in some way," says Congdon. "Older shopping centers all over the country are going through some kind of renovation to draw customers in and provide some form of entertainment for people while they're shopping."

Steve Carpenter, AIA, of Carpenter Sellers says shopping centers that pass the 10-year mark with no improvements have "missed the opportunity." Every decade piled onto a shopping center requires "something dramatic, whether it's creating skylights,







Change of face: With its last major remodeling dating back to 1992, the Boulevard's "expressionless" facades and featureless interior storefronts could use new life. They're likely to get it-the expansive center has shown a knack over its 35 years for adapting to a changing customer base.





Though it pioneered suburban shopping and outdoor dining, Green Valley Town Center's 1980s aesthetic needs updating if the center is to attract new retailers and customers.

adding features such as fountains or creating areas for live entertainment," Carpenter says. Not only will such enhancements boost the energy of a center, but they'll also give property owners fresh marketing opportunities—a new grand opening, for example—that keep the mall's name out there.

The Boulevard's owner, Chicago-based General Growth Properties, announced a multimillion-dollar plan in June to renovate its Meadows Mall. But the company declined to comment on its plans for the Boulevard.

Even with a face-lift, the Boulevard must maneuver a larger, national shift in the shopping-center paradigm. "The suburban indoor mall as a stand-alone entity is, in some people's eyes, becoming a dated concept," says Steve Swisher, AIA, a principal with Swisher & Hall. "The newer, more successful ideas combine retail with some other component, such as residential or office space. Also, we have newer malls in Las Vegas associated with gaming and entertainment."

But new retail trends do not mean the Boulevard should be scrapped. As the area around it ages, Carpenter says, it ripens for redevelopment. "Redevelopment activities will probably help the Boulevard stay viable, but attracting new stores and putting a fresh face on it is a must," he says. "Las Vegans are fickle. We like new things."

Green Valley Town Center: Ready for renewal

When the first two phases of Green Valley Town Center were built at Sunset Road and Mountain Vista Street in Henderson in 1994 and 1995, the surrounding residential area was among the most sought-after destinations in the Valley. As the first major shopping center in Green Valley, the Town Center was instantly very vibrant, says Rick Shelton, broker-owner of RE/MAX Associates. "It was the innovation of retail, with its interactive fountains for kids and its outdoor food court. It evolved into a restaurant hub for Green Valley proper."

Less than a decade later, the luster has dimmed. Several restaurants have come and gone, and major retailers, including Petco and Furniture Showcase, abandoned their shops to move near the newer Anthem and Seven Hills master plans. Small store spaces lie empty as well. And the area's many new state-of-the-art cinemas have rendered the center's United Artists Theatre obsolete.

Green Valley Town Center has reached an identity crossroads. Its feeder market is maturing. Its severe aesthetic statement—a virtually unbroken expanse of spare, white, undulating store space, with a series of trellised botanical sculptures and a central courtyard with a fountain—is outdated, even uninviting, says one architect. Every shopping center arrives at this point in its life cycle, when it transforms from the cutting edge into second-generation space, architecturally and commercially locked in the era that yielded it as contemporary centers grab customers. Shelton, who leases space for his real estate brokerage at the town center, says brisk growth means every neighborhood and shopping center in Las Vegas is outmoded after about a decade. "Everything here is new at some point," he says, "and then it's dropped like a hot potato and deserted for the next hot property or corridor."

The Town Center, though, appears ready for its second evolution. "Up-and-coming areas don't deliver anywhere near the personality or the convenience that the Green Valley Town Center corridor delivers," Shelton says. "We're going to see a massive recycling in that corridor."

Like the major overhaul American Nevada gave Green Valley Plaza, the Trader Joe's-anchored shopping center across the street, last year. The renovation included new storefront facades—an imperative, Shelton says. "It shows confidence in the property on the part of landlords and retailers. That always stimulates consumers." In fact, he's observed about a 30 percent increase in parking lot traffic since the renovation. "It's crammed."

Green Valley Town Center's third and final phase, designed about three years ago by California firm MCG Architecture, might offer



Green Valley Town Center's third phase shows some of the warming touches that could lend the property a humanistic scale (above). Though there are some attractive components (above right) and the complex is still evolving, much of Boca Park is already unrecognizable from its original plans, which called for a sandstone-hued, mixed-use village (right).

clues about a second incarnation of the center. "The first two phases weren't separated out very well," says Jill Alexander, the MCG project manager who designed the last phase, just east of Green Valley Parkway along Sunset. "Those phases definitely have a 1980s-modern approach to retail architecture. But we've seen a lot of projects undergo rehabilitation and a face-lift to make them more appealing to shoppers. It has a lot to do with creating spaces—breaking up long runs of retail that go on for hundreds of feet."

The 58,000-square-foot third phase's color palette is more varied. with soft earth tones changing subtly from store to store. Its square columns are scored with blue tiles, and a curved staircase to the second floor provides a gentle focal point. About 20 feet in front of the building's east end stands a faux facade—a strictly aesthetic miniature colonnade that provides added dimension and texture. The only nod to the first two phases: the trellised botanical theme, which is sustained in sculptures and balustrades. "Everything was designed to help move shoppers down the center but have a different feel with different elements," Alexander says.

John Kilduff, president and chief executive of American Nevada, says the company completed a review in June of possible upgrades to the first two segments of Town Center. But the changes will not be significant, he notes, consisting perhaps of fresh paint and other light finishing touches.

Bigger design changes needn't be expensive or difficult. "A lot of times, it just means warming up the buildings—adding cornice treatments, stone, awnings, railings, new landscaping and lighting," says Jeff Gill, MCG's managing principal. "It's amazing what just changing the colors, or adding multiple colors, can do to warm up a building. Timeless architecture has a very humanistic scale. We notice a lot of fieldstone and flagstone in design today. Those materials have been around for hundreds of years, so they allow us to design for permanence."





Heavy investments in remodeling are premature until the center's larger vacancies are filled, Shelton says, because properties deteriorate more quickly when they're unoccupied. But he adds that American Nevada can start reviving the center now without touching its design. "Enhancing signage would help lure retailers. But more important, the center's owners should go back to that driving force, which was a personality and panache that no one has replicated," he says, "Barley's [Casino & Brewing Co.] could schedule happy hours and jazz concerts on Thursdays and Fridays. Activity breeds activity. The foundation the town center was developed upon is still affluent, and that will facilitate its resurgence."

Boca Park: A promising center in flux

As envisioned in the mid-1990s, Boca Park would have blazed an exciting new trail in local development. The property's Canadian owner, Triple Five Development, planned to build the Valley's first mixed-use village—an expansive community of retail and office space commingled with upscale apartments, condominiums and townhouses at the northeast corner of Rampart and West Charleston boulevards in Peccole Ranch. Cars would be optional—residents could walk to work or to buy groceries. Visitors could spend a day sauntering down the center's main boulevard, browsing and congregating in a park-like setting.

Triple Five retained local design firm Swisher & Hall to draw up plans for Boca Park. Swisher & Hall's original model shows a series of sandy, warmly colored buildings ranging from two to six stories flanking a central boulevard. The idea was to create a pedestrian-friendly center in a contemporary desert style—a sort of territorial deco, says Steve Swisher, firm principal.

Anyone who's shopped Boca Park knows that, at some point, the plan changed significantly. There are no condominiums, no second or





Boca Park's first phase (above) kept to the initial "desertdeco" plan. In a portent of things to come, the center's second phase uses cream-colored marble and Mission-style touches to impart an upscale Southern California feel.

third—let alone sixth—stories. There's no tree-lined central boulevard to encourage the long, hot hoof from Target to the Great Indoors. Boca's first phase, along Charleston, adheres to Swisher & Hall's desert-deco styling—angular storefronts with olive, sandstone and red hues that match the distant Spring Mountains. But the second phase veers off vision, with its white buildings and Mission-style touches. Few architects know what to make of the change, except that cohesiveness is lacking. "It has the appearance of being put together by different people at different times," says one Valley designer. Adds another: "It has multiple personalities."

"Boca Park's evolution was a product of the economics involved in building centers like that," says Doug Walton, principal of WPH Architecture. "There are good intentions of having newer retail development start out as something that really attracts people, but I think those intentions are tempered by the reality."

"In the end, retailers still want a square box on a flat site," Swisher says, over something like a mixed-use concept, which was too ahead of the curve then and had not enough to do with the bot-

While the verdict is out on what Boca Park will mean to shoppers—the center is not quite two-thirds complete—Jean Marc Joveidi, senior executive vice president of Triple Five, says the newest phase is an improvement on the initial design. "When we first started, the vision was for a village look with this kind of dark paint and a lot of columns around the buildings, which would block views for tenants and not allow people to feel comfortable," he says. "We wanted to change it a little bit. We wanted a Rodeo Drive look—the stronger look of an upscale lifestyle center. So we took all the columns off and spent a lot of money on marble."

Upon completion of the second phase, where the Cheesecake Factory and the Great Indoors are situated, the developer will build the third phase of the 2.4 million-square-foot center. Joveidi promises "a very upscale lifestyle center." Two major department stores are scouting the site, and smaller retailers will include "five-star tenants, like Versace or Chanel." And he adds that in its third incarnation, depending on what its new tenants want, Boca Park could morph yet again—into an enclosed, indoor mall.

Joveidi acknowledges that Boca Park's split personality is confusing to consumers. So, when the shopping center is complete around mid-2005, he says the company will overhaul the desert-deco first phase to resemble the Rodeo Drive aesthetic of the second and third phases, for which Perlman Architects Inc. is handling the design. "The average income within five miles of Boca Park is more than \$90,000," Joveidi says of the reasoning behind the change. "These shoppers want to feel like they are in Beverly Hills, Miami or Orange County. They want to drive five minutes and be in an upscale neighborhood center. So we're adding a lot of landscaping, wall fountains, white marble, underground parking and valet parking. If the shopping center has that whole look in more than two million square feet, it will definitely attract shoppers."

Even as Boca Park seeks itself, watchers agree it has left its mark on local retail design and development. Joveidi sees Boca Park's influence in Rampart Commons, the Pottery Barn- and Williams-Sonomaanchored lifestyle center across the street, and in The Shops at Green Valley Ranch, a mixed-use community American Nevada Company is developing in Henderson. Boca Park "has changed the taste of day-today customers and how they look at a shopping center," he says. "It's not just a Vons or Target center—it's a place where they want to spend some time."

Jennifer Robison is a special-projects editor and real estate writer for the Greenspun Media Group.



IN THE PARKING GO(I. Everything I Need to Know About Urban

What to do about our Valley's big, ugly, hot, dangerous, lawless mazes of asphalt? Are all of those evils necessary?

(Mostly Evil)

BY SCOTT DICKENSHEETS **ILLUSTRATION BY KEITH NEGLEY**

Planning I Learned from Chipmunks.

Just a parking lot? That's what I thought, too: Flat. Black. Too devoid of interest or meaning to need a third adjective. Even so, I apparently found it perfectly absorbing, back in the old days when I worked at a second-floor window seat, because I frittered away a lot of company time mindlessly sweeping my eyes across the flat, black expanse below.

There wasn't much going on down there, except what's always going on down there; except for the uneasy coexistence of rolling cars and pedestrians who think they were born with the right of way—tiny dramas of brake squeak and angry glare; except for the ad hoc rumor committees that briefly convene when arriving employees pause to gossip with departing employees; except for the knots of smokers exiled into the sun by the tightening clench of workplace smoking rules; except for the prosperity index you could arrive at by comparing the number of nice cars to the junkers; except for the status hierarchy illustrated by who gets covered spaces vs. who's stuck with first-come, first-park; except for the greasy scrim of human habitation left on the asphalt itself—the oil drips, fluid spills, dumped coffee. flicked butts, emptied ashtrays, tossed cups, stomped gum and way too many entries under the broad category of Stains I'd Rather Not Know the Origin Of.

On top of all that nothing going on, there was, of course, the translucent overlay of memory—recollections of a hundred after-work bull sessions in this and other lots; backseat romances; barely remembered news reports of bodies found in parking lots; the time I smashed my finger in a shopping cart and passed out in the Skaggs Drug Store lot, and the rough press of the dimpled asphalt against my cheek as I came to ... the sort of stuff that subconsciously footnotes even our most mundane activities—such as staring dumbly at a parking lot.

OK, OK, you've tumbled to the point here, which is that there was more going on in the humble parking lot than was immediately apparent. All that motion and grime, the spontaneous social rituals, constituted an anthropology of sorts—clues that say something about the way we liveas well as a reminder that even a part of the built environment as rote as a parking lot can host activities as varied as the structures they girdle.

What eventually opened my eyes to that were the chipmunks. A colony of them thrived in the lot's decorative shrubbery and a nearby flood ditch. Darting from the protective shadows beneath Mercedes-Benzes and Isuzu Rodeos, they conducted their salvage business among our castoff crap. They were the exotic detail that, for me, threw into relief the everyday complexity unfolding on the pavement around

them. Parking lots are not, in fact, devoid of meaning. It was a nice little insight, and to reward the chipmunks for it, I used to leave them piles of vending machine potato chips. Only later did it occur to me that feeding them tasty cholesterol was a dubious way to say thanks.

II. But Parking Lots Aren't All Chipmunks and Daydreaming.

I'm backing, inch by agonizing inch, out of a space in front of the 7-Eleven at Horizon and Pacific in Henderson. There are supermarket aisles with more travel room than this lot, which, in addition to the vertical spaces in front of the door, has a row of horizontal spaces by the street, creating a vortex of chaos right behind me. Some yahoo has parked his jacked-up land yacht beside me, so I can't see oncoming cars. Easing past the truck's bumper, I see someone in an old beater racing for the exit, a path that'll take him through the exact patch of asphalt I'm backing onto.

Twenty percent of low-speed vehicle accidents occur in parking lots, according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. Sightlines are poor, there's rarely adequate room for pedestrians and, in many lots, it's not clear where the layout is trying to direct you. Vast, badly lighted and often unpatrolled, parking lots see worse than fender-bendersaccording to one published estimate, 80 percent of shopping center crimes occur in parking lots, some 750,000 violent incidents a year.

The car misses my rear fender by the width of an insurance form. I shout something at the driver, and my exact words are less important than their obvious subtext: Who designs these lots? is really what I'm asking. Architects, it turns out. You assume that a parking lot is a hurried formality at the end of the process, something the architect lets the intern do with the leftover space. Not really. Governments enforce parking-to-squarefootage ratios, depending on the sort of traffic a building will generate (a mall in the county, for example, must have four spaces per 1,000 square feet of floor space), so a designer has to take that into account early, says J. Windom Kimsey of Tate Snyder Kimsey Architects. "It's going to affect the footprint of your building; it may have to be smaller and taller."

So parking isn't the afterthought we took it to be, although actually

configuring the spaces is often left to interns; computers make it easy now. In other words, not much design energy is lavished there. No one is looking to make a name for himself by revolutionizing the way we park. Consequently, far too frequently, entrances, exits and traffic flow seem to have been given rudimentary thought at best. The chaos is heightened by the understandable human belief that normal traffic rules don't apply in a parking lot. Stop signs don't, after all, mean stop. It's OK to park in traffic in front of the store's door. You don't care where the lines on the ground want you to go, you're cutting across, baby.

"I think it's a function of the size of the lots," Kimsey says. "People see that much space and think, what the heck; if I want to get over there, why not just cut across?"

That's how Americans are when we sense freedom—we overdo it. Perhaps all that empty space inflames our sense of manifest destiny; we're a people that loves conquering territory. Maybe that smooth asphalt plain stirs our ancestral memory of the African flatlands. Possibly, we're just a bunch of jerks.

On top of all that, parking lots are just plain ugly.

III. Four Reasons New Urbanists Hate Parking Lots More Than We Do.

Parking lots are, of course, evil. Well, if not precisely evil evil, they do represent much that is wrong-headed, anti-human and ultimately destructive about the way we build cities. That, at any rate, is the heart of the New Urbanist critique—New Urbanists being the closest thing there is to an organized anti-parking-lot faction.

Let's begin with a visit to that most basic unit of evil, my parking space. Nine by 19 feet: 171 square feet. Upstairs, my workspace is 62 square feet. Which means my company devotes nearly three times as much space to parking my ride than to me doing my work. (And I'm in management.) The only benefit my company accrues from its investment in that parking space is that it makes it easy for me to come to work. Like most people, (1) I don't pay for parking.

"It's written in Leviticus that thou shalt have free parking," Jeffrey Tumlin, an urban consultant in San Francisco, says with the rueful sarcasm you'd expect of a New Urbanist fighting an uphill battle.

He points out the obvious: Free doesn't mean without cost. Someone pays for the land that gets blacktopped, and that cost is figured into the rent commercial tenants pay, into the goods and services they sell. "It's not insignificant," Tumlin says. "There have been some studies of the increase in the cost of goods due to parking lots. It's pretty high."

With free parking at home and at work, we have few incentives not to drive. By ourselves. Which means more cars that need more spaces, and here the dominoes begin falling as the issue of parking tumbles into other, broader concerns: zoning, transit, development. More cars mean more congestion, more stress on the infrastructure. More parking spaces. More distance between buildings. More (2) environmental stress as parking lots slough oily runoff water into torrents and create microclimates hot enough to cook you in your own gravy between your car and the store. More driving. More sprawl. Still more driving. "It's a self-replicating loop," Tumlin says.

He and others of a New Urbanist bent advocate businesses charging employees to park as a way to encourage carpooling and public transit. Don't tell him about our ineffective public transit; similar measures in the San Fernando Valley, he says—a place with no better transit than

Vegas—resulted in a 20 percent shift toward carpooling. Nationwide, some businesses offer employees bus passes in the amount calculated to be the annual benefit of free parking. The point is, at first, to unclog the streets a little, and, in the long run, to reduce the need for parking spaces, allowing buildings to be closer together—within walking distance.

Which brings us to another point about my space: (3) It's one of hundreds of thousands just like it. We tend not to dwell on how much of the Valley sits paved and empty. And empty they mostly are. "When was the last time you saw the parking lot at Target full?" Kimsey asks. Some commercial developers install more than the required number of spaces to ensure that the lot never looks full, even during holiday shopping.

Much of the problem, says New Urbanism.com director Andy Kunz, is that zoning codes encourage large tracts of single-use land—that is, a big-box store with a parking lot you could land a jet on—instead of the New Urbanist ideal, the old Main Street setup of smaller shops with living spaces above them or neighborhoods within walking distance.

The result? An archipelago of suburban work or shopping destinations separated by small seas of asphalt. "So every trip becomes an auto trip," Tumlin says. "You can't link several trips to one parking space."

And now, having set out from my single parking space, we've arrived at the heart of our asphalt bungle: What is all that suburban pavement but (4) the perfect environment ... for cars? The parking lot is an entirely apt symbol for the way cities are no longer scaled for people. A Wal-Mart blacktop is an environment of pure function; there's nothing human about it. A city gridded with parking lots ultimately discourages community, the New Urbanists will tell you. "The higher percentage of land devoted to parking, the fewer people who can live there—then you have fewer services and a lower quality of life," Kunz says.

That growth pattern encourages cultural blandness—you can't window-shop from a passing car, so instead of finding new, offbeat places to shop, you look for familiar symbols, the golden arches or the big red bull's-eye. A shopping district designed for strolling would create a more leisurely, people-oriented atmosphere. Vast parking lots turn us into consumers on a mission. "A parking lot doesn't provide any opportunity for community, for random encounters with other people," says Steven Bozdin, communications director for the Congress of New Urbanism. Asphalt is a vital element in the cycle of congestion and gridlock that's sapping our quality of life. "If you're spending a third of your day in traffic, you don't have quality of life," Kunz says.

IV. Exit: This Way to the Real World.

So, New Urbanism, sure. I'm down with those guys. But, on the other hand, don't you just love a wide, empty parking lot? Whereas parking garages give me the willies—there's something forbidding about driving into a huge concrete box of uncertain design—I'm always relieved to see a savannah of asphalt ringing my destination. Such is the curious psychology of the parking lot: Even though we've been warned about its downside, we're just so easily beguiled by its ease. Maybe that's what will doom us to an asphalt future: It's convenient, and we value that more than good design or acts of random community.

"A few years ago, I would have agreed with them"—the New Urbanists—"on every count," a friend tells me. "These days, I just like being able to drive wherever I want to."

Scott Dickensheets is managing editor of the Las Vegas Weekly.



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In the gaming industry, casino resort properties now more than ever are searching to diversify the entertainment and amenities they can offer their customers. Generating traffic and keeping their customers interested requires progressive change and innovation. A major hurdle to the diversification of a casino is the skyrocketing expense of constructing new facilities. Lower revenue-generating entertainment and amenities are great for building foot traffic, but they may not justify the costs of permanent construction and staffing of the facility.

Any expansion has to compliment the existing property. It needs to fill a demand and add value, whether it is to generate revenue, or just to have more ways to entertain the customers and

keep them on-site. The management at Valley View Casino, an enterprise of the San Pasqual Band of Mission Indians, located a few miles from Escondido, California, believes they have found the answer. "We needed more space, but still required versatility as we plan our new resort casino over the next several years," reports Richard Fitzhugh, director of slot operations at Valley View.

A Bingo Pavilion was the answer. "This semi-permanent structure is fully constructed and ready for use in 45 days," he continued. "It meets the building codes, has restrooms, offices, and a wet bar, and is a great environment for bingo. Instead of spending \$100 to \$130 per square foot for permanent construction that takes eight or nine months, we will be operating in 45 days at a cost of less than \$45 per square foot. On top of the savings in the cost of construction, seven months of cash flow would have been lost waiting for construction to finish. As our plans for future expansion develop, we may choose to either move the structure, convert it to special events, administrative offices or whatever we may need as we plan the new resort casino. In the meantime, our customers now have entertainment options."

By using the structure to instead house gaming floor space, the equation is the same, only with much greater returns. "We constructed the 8,400 square foot structure that was intended to be for Bingo. However, the space was so effective that, before we could open the Bingo, we decided that it would be more profitable to use the structure as slot space. We closed the Bingo, converted it to gaming floor space, rebuilt the bar and cash cages, and now our casino patrons cannot even tell that they are playing slots in a 'tent structure'!'

The structures have proven to be cost-effective solutions in other markets as well. Specifically, in the golf industry, recent economic shifts have forced golf course finance and development plans to be downsized. "The key to the golf course is always the course itself," states Brad Sears, mayor and lead decision-maker for the new golf course at the city of Cedar Hills, Utah. "If you can save money somewhere, you have to look at the construction costs of the facilities first."

Since 9-II and the stock market crash, luxury/recreation investment dollars are not easy to come by. A golf course takes four or five years to plan and develop, and you have to be able to adjust as the market for your product changes.

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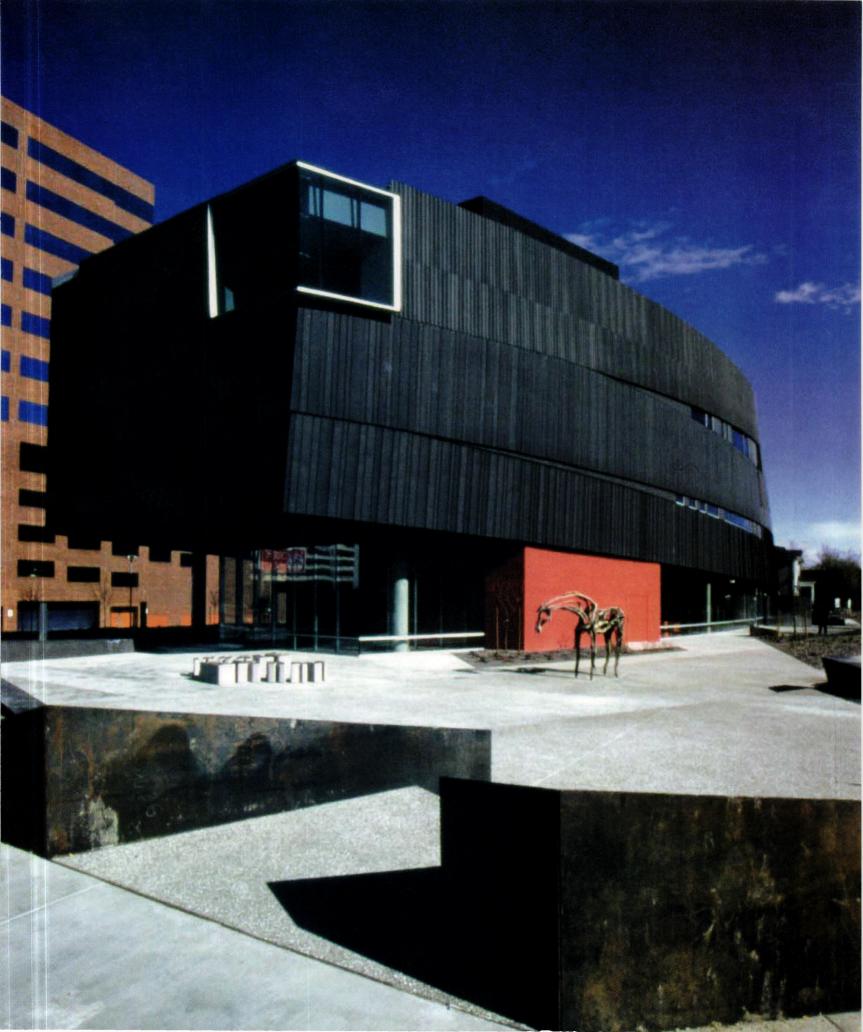
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ART LESSONS FROM RENO

Las Vegas could learn a thing or two from a well-designed marvel up north—the new Nevada Museum of Art

By William L. Fox











Reno's art museum features the wide-open Reynolds Hall (above) and the colorful Prim Theater (above center). The Las Vegas Art Museum's spaces (top center and right) are in the Sahara Library, a beautiful building (next page, left) but not much of an announcement for the museum. Meanwhile, on the Strip: the late Guggenheim (next page, far right).

For the longest time, the architecture of downtown Reno has

been remarkably ... unremarkable. The stolid 1909 beaux arts Washoe County courthouse and the 1934 art deco/moderne post office, both designed by Frederick J. DeLongchamps, still stand, as does his 1927 Riverside Hotel, now refashioned sensibly into artists' lofts. But most of the downtown's older buildings were demolished during the last quarter of the 20th century to make way for an expansion of the gaming industry.

The last keystone of downtown to fall, the ornate and handsome Mapes Hotel that had opened in 1947, was imploded with great fanfare in 2000 in order to make room for ... well, no one quite knows what. The one-acre lot, which borders the intersection of Virginia Street and the Truckee River, is arguably the city's prime historical corner, yet it remains empty. The vacancy symbolizes the imbalance of political power between the downtown gaming interests and the town's residents, the latter having vocally and overwhelmingly opposed the demolition. Currently, the mayor is pushing a national competition for the design of a civic plaza on the forlorn corner.

The four-square blandness of downtown has been relieved only periodically and somewhat comically by three geodesic structures. It took three decades for the metallic dome of the Pioneer Center for the Performing Arts, built in the go-go 1960s, to be transformed in the public's eve from the "Golden Pimple" into a respectable piece of Populuxe modernity, but anything eccentric downtown that lasts more than 20 years becomes a candidate for affection. The other two geodesic assemblages were spheres erected in 1995, one for the National Bowling Stadium, the other as a theme attraction for the Silver Legacy hotel-casino. The highest accolade so far that locals have been able to muster for the duo is that "Reno finally got some balls."

None of the buildings downtown acknowledged to any great degree the unique landscape, either physical or social, of the city. Even the city's effort to redevelop a couple of retail blocks on First Street along the river produced only generic boxes dressed up in the faux facades of a Victorian West that never existed in Reno. The project drew the understandable ire of residents, and their displacement

from downtown was virtually complete, the only grace note left being the nearby Wingfield Park.

The new Nevada Museum of Art begins to redress this situation on all fronts with astonishing boldness.

Designed by Phoenix architect Will Bruder, AIA, the Reno museum has an elegant and slightly torqued shape that evokes a mountain's emergence from the floor of the Black Rock Desert north of town. The 68-foot-high by 250-foot-long matte black facade has a bold sculptural presence, but the design also creates an inviting streetscape, with a completely transparent ground for the lobby, a café that spills outdoors and a sculpture garden that spills indoors. This permeability embodies the museum's integration into the city. It is, says museum director Steven High, a building that looks out as well as in.

Meanwhile, we down here in this booming, relatively wealthy city to the south have to be questioning our ability to produce astonishing boldness. While Reno appeared mired in its worst of times during the last decade, we became home to standout contemporary designs ranging from Rem Koolhaas' Guggenheim to the Clark County Government Center, and to the ambitious library buildings in several neighborhoods around the city. There wasn't much reason for our booming metropolis to envy its northern sister culturally or architecturally. Now there is, as the tale of these two cities has gone in a completely different direction.

Suddenly, almost overnight, the question for us is, why can't we have something like Reno? We can, of course, but it bears looking at how the Biggest Little City in the World secured itself this jewel.

I. The Patrons

Las Vegas' finest architectural achievements have been in the for-profit and government sectors; arts institutions, however, tend to rely on private, nonprofit funding. Our nonprofit sector has yet to weigh in with a signature building. Any nonprofit museum requires a certain critical mass of cultural capital, including a pool of local collectors. And for such a museum to commission an architect as distinctive as Bruder requires still more—patrons of archi-





tecture who are also committed to the museum.

Reno has such a combination in Peter and Turkey Stremmel. The Stremmel Gallery, located on Reno's Virginia Street but several blocks south of downtown, has for almost 30 years been the premier commercial art gallery in Nevada. In the beginning, the Stremmels dealt in wildlife and cowboy art, then they started cultivating a local audience for serious regional landscape painting. During the late 1980s, they formed a partnership with New York's prestigious Acquavella Gallery and Sotheby's Auction House in order to house and sell off the contents of a major post-impressionist estate, one of the more important art collections to come up for sale during the last quarter of the 20th century. The Stremmels were thus able to exhibit and sell internationally noteworthy artwork next to pieces by local artists. In this way, they helped create the crucial group of knowledgeable collectors in Reno who would later support the museum.

Meanwhile, the Stremmels were becoming not only patrons of the arts, but of architecture. For their private residence, they had already built one of the nicer Santa Fe-style haciendas in the state, and in the mid-1990s they commissioned Mark Mack, a renowned Austrian-born architect then residing in San Francisco, to imagine a new, contemporary house for them. He built them a structure that led Nevada residential architecture into the 21st century—a series of hard-edged blocks sheathed in the dusky yellows, reds and greens of desert flora and bound together with an angled 26-foot-high galvanized steel shed roof, an element derived from truck stops along Interstate 80. It was immediately clear that Mack, a supreme colorist, had deployed a palette uniquely suited to the Great Basin. The Stremmels went on to commission Mack to redo their gallery.

The Stremmel Gallery had started out in 1969 in offices tucked into one end of the local Volkswagen dealership, and then moved to an old title company on the north end of the block, which in turn was reconfigured by Reno architect and artist Maurice Nespor into an award-winning gallery space. But though the newly rounded-off exterior was compatible with the street, the interior was hampered by ceilings that were too low and a lack of natural light. When the

Stremmels turned to Mack, he literally raised the roof, let in the light and boldly fronted red and orange walls with a grid of honeycombed metal. The gallery now makes the strongest visual statement on all of Virginia Street.

The Stremmels aren't the least bit shy about going forth where others fear to tread. Throughout their own evolution as connoisseurs of art and architecture, they have, at various times, sat on the board and committees of the Nevada Museum of Art. In this capacity, they were able to be a driving force in the selection of Bruder. They have, in short, increased the cultural capital of the city.

II. The Organization

The Nevada Museum of Art was founded in 1931 and is the state's oldest nonprofit arts organization. How it came to commission Bruder is a result of multiple long-term investments in the local cultivation of arts patronage and connoisseurship. In the early 1970s, when the museum was still called the Nevada Art Gallery and resided in a modest house, the board of directors began hiring professional staff. One of the early executive directors was Suzanne Loomis, who had moved from New York City, where she had worked for William Acquavella. (Acquavella, incidentally, would later guide many of Steve Wynn's purchases.) Loomis, in 1978, hired Marcia Growdon, a young curator with a Ph.D. from Stanford who would become the museum's director by 1981. This commitment to a professional staff, people who in turn brought with them a national network of contacts, was a key investment in Reno's cultural portfolio. Loomis and Growdon raised the museum's environmental and security standards, thus enabling it to attract significant art for its exhibitions, sometimes. At the same time, they began to cultivate local patrons who collected art and to educate them in how one could buy a painting for personal pleasure, but then promise it to the art museum in return for a tax deduction, a method museums commonly use to build their collections.

During the tenure of the two women, the museum changed its name, first to the Sierra Nevada Museum of Art, then to the Nevada Museum of Art, which reflected a slowly expanding mandate. The

museum didn't just get a new name, it also got a new venue, moving in 1988 from a historic mansion to a former title insurance building, a 15,000-square-foot facility that put the museum for the first time on the edge of downtown.

Once again bursting at its seams in the late 1990s, the museum was forced to consider expansion. Under the quietly ambitious directorship of Steven High, who was hired in 1996, the board and staff began to consider the possibilities, which included the addition of a second story or moving to an entirely new location. What they had in mind was not just meeting the programming needs of the museum, but building a signature facility that would attract residents and also stand downtown's geometry on its head. They decided this would best be done by expanding the existing site and working with an architect who could decisively break the barrier of banality downtown. Bruder's building does all that and more.

III. The Architect

Will Bruder is best known for his design of the Phoenix Central

Library, which opened in 1995. Its five stories are clad in copper and glass and evoke the rise of a sandstone mesa in Arizona's Monument Valley. Inside, public spaces revolve around what the architect calls a "futuristic crystal canyon," and on the ground floor a reflecting pool provides visitors with an oasis from the oppressive heat. The building thus recapitulates, but also provides shelter from, its environment.

When Bruder was selected for the Reno project, museum director High took him up into the Sierra and out into the desert, educating him on the indigenous shapes of the Northern Nevada landscape. This was a requisite step in the design process, but in this case it was essential for metaphorical as well as pragmatic reasons: Many of the museum's most important permanent holdings are the paintings in its Sierra Nevada/Great Basin collection and the photographs of the Altered Landscape collection. Both of these collections focus on the intersection of culture and nature in the shape of the land, an intersection that is nowhere more manifest than in the arid West. With the museum facade's echoing of the Sierras and the Black Rock Desert, Bruder has given the city an image from its own nature, literature and art. It is, as High had hoped, a signature, a monolith in Anthrax Zinc that both stands out and fits in, handsomely backdropped by a nearby red-brick office building.

On the museum's second floor, in the two-story room that holds changing contemporary exhibitions, the northeast corner of the traditional white cube gallery is eliminated, with large glass windows not only providing natural light, but reminding visitors that the environment in Nevada is defined not only by earth, but by sky. Viewers find themselves transfixed by the palpable volume of light in the corner as much as by the artwork on the walls. Reno, High says, needed a place to gather, and Bruder has provided it. By creating a seductive flow between the building and its surroundings, he has succeeded in creating a powerful eddy in the flow of downtown, and along the way he has manifested in his design the intent of the museum's collections. The building reaches that rare pinnacle in architecture, a trope—in this case, a piece of landscape art that functions as part of the landscape while commenting on and altering it.

Not many museums manage to pull off such sophisticated reasoning, and two years ago most people said it couldn't be done. How could anyone raise \$14 million to build a new cultural facility in Reno? The economy was headed south, Reno's tourism and gaming had been soft for years, and the university was embarking on its own ambitious capital campaign at the same time. But by May, when the 65,000square-foot building opened at nearly four times its previous size, the Nevada Museum of Art had raised more than \$22 million. This was enough not only to pay for construction, but to substantially increase the museum's endowment.

IV. The Lesson

At the same time workers were painting the Nevada Museum of Art's gallery walls, the Guggenheim Museum was closing its major facility on the Strip. Meanwhile, the Las Vegas Art Museum was hastily juggling its finances, having been forced to let go of both its relatively new director and its head of fund-raising. The Las Vegas economy is larger than Reno's by magnitudes, but the relative cultural wealth of the two cities is not a simple matter. Some Las Vegas arts organizations, most notably the Nevada Ballet Theatre, are as successful as Reno's museum. But the tale of two museums, and the larger civic context in which they function, is a lesson in how the social landscape is constructed.

The achievement of a society—whether at the civic, regional or national level—is defined nowhere as persuasively as by the cultural objects it displays in an art museum, a collection that includes the building itself. The museum is where the social landscape can physically manifest. That Reno has a successful downtown museum and Las Vegas has a struggling one marginalized in a suburban library says much about the differences in the social fabric of the two cities.

Underpinning Reno's museum are the investments made over the course of decades by local patrons and connoisseurs who have deliberately constructed cultural landscapes that reflect their physical and historical environments. This is in distinct contrast to the art shown on the Las Vegas Strip. The Guggenheim collaboration with the Venetian brought, and continues to bring in its smaller space, simply terrific art for locals and tourists alike to view. But there is no local ownership and no participation in the life of the citizens. The Bellagio Gallery of Fine Art, now operated by one of the offshoots of PaceWildenstein in New York City, is likewise one of the hotel's many entertainment options for tourists; it is not a place for locals to congregate, much less examine and understand their own culture. Both the Guggenheim and the Bellagio gallery are run to serve the interests of their East Coast headquarters, not the needs of Las Vegans. And both have, perhaps, distracted Las Vegans from the need to have a museum Downtown that is accessible to and representative of the Valley's residential population.

Las Vegas has both serious art collectors and architectural patrons; often, they're the same people. But there has not yet been a sustained commitment to amassing the cultural capital it will take to grant the public its own collection and commission a private building. In Reno, however, we've now seen what is possible: a museum's energetic and well-supported commitment to serve the residents of its city and state. One doesn't have to look hard to see this. It's written in the architecture.

William L. Fox, a Los Angeles-based writer, will be a scholar-inresidence this fall at the University of Nevada, Reno, where he will be finishing a book about the nature of culture and the culture of nature in Las Vegas.

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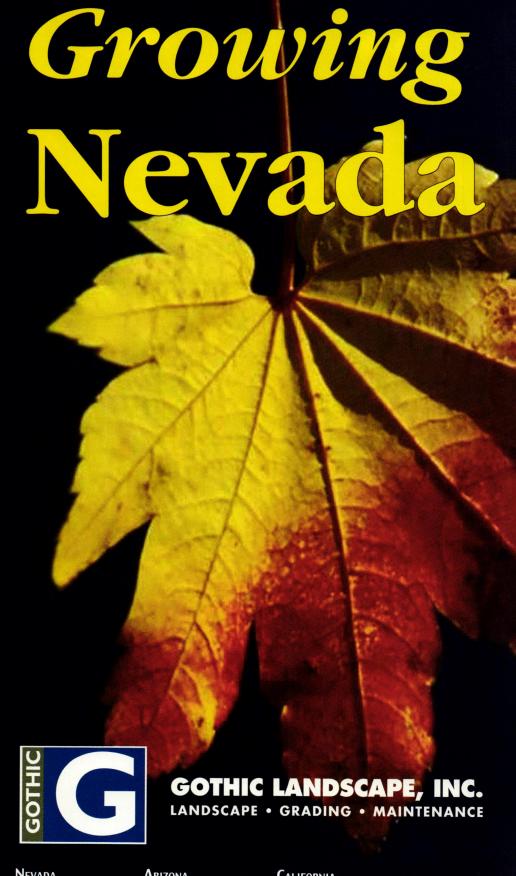
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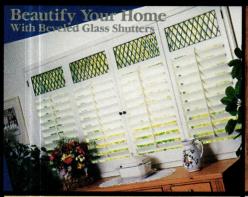


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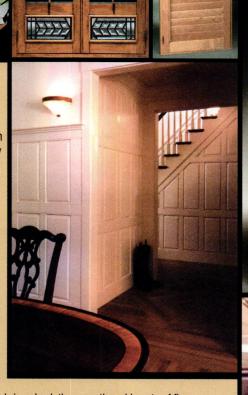
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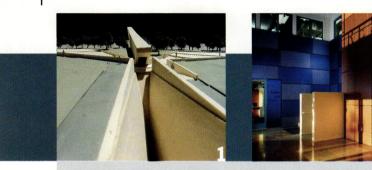
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The Las Vegas Chapter of the American Institute of Architects provides a variety of programs, lectures and community events to which the public is invited. Here are some of the events scheduled for 2003-04. Call the AIA Las Vegas office at (702) 895-0936 if you'd like to attend.

AIA Nevada Excellence in Design & **Distinguished Service Awards Banquet**

October 11, Caesars Palace

Join us for a celebration of the finest in architectural design and distinguished service to the profession and the community. This black-tie optional event is open to the public. Tickets are \$90 and can be purchased through the AIA Las Vegas office or at aialasvegas.org.

AIA Las Vegas Product Show

October 15, Riviera Grand Pavilion

More than 120 exhibitors featuring the very latest in products, services and technology for the design and building industries, the AIA Product Show is open to the public at no charge. There are great cash door prizes, refreshments and a lot to learn.

CANstruction Competition

Want to help feed the hungry in Las Vegas and show off your creative talents at the same time? Teams of architects, engineers, contractors, designers, students and citizens design and build structures made entirely from canned foods within a 10-by-10foot space. These structures will be built and put on display at Fashion Show in October and will be juried for awards. In the end, all of the canned foods are donated to the Food Bank of Las Vegas. Contact Maggie Allred at 436-7272 if you have a team that is interested in participating.

AIA Las Vegas High School Design Awards

This is the longest and most successful program provided to the public by the AIA Las Vegas Chapter. Each year, drafting and design students throughout Clark County High Schools participate. Many have gone on to achieve successful careers in design and architecture. Under the supervision of their high school instructors, students work on an AIA design project all year. On April 21, 2004, their efforts will be rewarded with a juried exhibit, reception and awards of recognition. Call the AIA office for details.

AIA Holiday Celebration

December 10. location TBD

AIA members and friends celebrate the end of the year and the beginning of a new year with this black-tie event. Silent auction and contributions from attendees benefit the Safe Nest Shelter. Newly elected officers and directors for the chapter are sworn into office during the evening, which is a celebration of all that is good in Las Vegas architecture.

AIA Las Vegas Golf Tournament

May 10, 2004, Spanish Trail Golf Course

Want to play in the longest-running annual tournament in Southern Nevada? With architects, engineers and designers from all over the state? The 31st annual tournament is a great way to enjoy a day of golf with some of the best players in Nevada. Fabulous prizes include the prestigious AIA Cup, so put a team together and plan to play in May.

2005 AIA National Convention

May 19-21, 2005, Mandalay Bay Convention Center

In less than two years, more than 22,000 architects and design professionals from all over the world will come here for the AIA's annual gathering. As the host chapter, AIA Las Vegas is making extraordinary plans to showcase our architecture, our communities and our citizens. Mark your calendars and watch for updates.

"Sustaining Nevada" Lecture Series

Beginning in September, the AIA Las Vegas Committee on the Environment will provide a lecture series to inform Nevada citizens of the benefits and necessity of integrating environmental design in the planning and construction of our communities, as well as its highly positive effect on our daily life. The speakers are from American architecture firms that are both committed to and have major experience in developing projects that incorporate sustainable design. This program has been funded, in part, by a grant from the Nevada Arts Council and the National Endowment for the Arts. Attendees will learn



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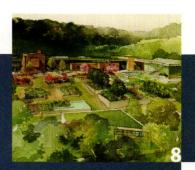
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about the many benefits of green building and the urgent need to embrace these ideals to maintain a high quality of life today, and preserve our limited future resources. Provided to the public without charge, the lectures will be in the UNLV School of Architecture library on Brussels Street near Tropicana Avenue. The lecture schedule includes the following:

September 10

Robert Shemwell, AIA, Partner

Overland Partners Architects, San Antonio, Texas

Robert Shemwell, who is a partner at Overland Partners Inc., has a comprehensive knowledge in environmental architecture and is a regular speaker on design and sustainability.

Richard Fernau & Laura Hartman, Principals

Fernau and Hartman Architects, Berkeley, California

Fernau and Hartman have extensive knowledge of environmental design and have both been published on subjects of green building. The firm's Westcott-Lahar House is part of the traveling Ten Shades of Green exhibition.

November 5

Craig Curtis, AIA, Partner

Miller | Hull Architects, Seattle

Curtis has received more than 120 national, regional and local design awards. Miller Hull recently received the 2003 Architecture Firm Award, a national honor bestowed by the AIA. It is the top prize the AIA gives to an architectural firm, and it is given to firms that produce distinguished designs for at least 10 years.

December 3

Thomas Nelson, AIA, vice president

HOK Architects, Culver City, California

Nelson is the senior project designer on sustainable design, a subject he has frequently lectured on at public events and universities. He has been involved with HOK's "Green Team" since its inception in 1993.

The 2003 AIA Nevada Excellence in Design & Distinguished Service Awards banquet is set for October 11. Pictured are 2002 award-winners, including Daniel Chenin's entry in the Martin Luther King Jr. National Memorial Competition (1); the Stal Tre Hus (2); and Trespa North America (3). AIA members will vie for the AIA Cup (4) during the 31st annual AIA Las Vegas Golf Tournament on May 10, 2004. On this page are images from projects done by David Nelson of Clanton & Associates (5), Richard Fernau and Laura Hartman of Fernau and Hartman Architects (6), Craig Curtis of Miller Hull Architects (7) and Robert Shemwell of Overland Partners Architects (8), all of whom are scheduled to speak as part of the AIA Las Vegas-sponsored lecture series.

February 11, 2004

Andrew Freear & Bruce Lindsey

Rural Studio, Auburn University, Alabama

Lindsey, co-director of Rural Studio and head of the School of Architecture, Auburn University Campus, and Freear, co-director and associate professor of Rural Studio, Newbern Campus, will be speaking about their program, which seeks solutions to the needs of the community within the community's own context, not from outside it.

March 10, 2004

Victor Olgyay, AIA, vice president

ENSar Group, Boulder, Colorado

Victor Olgyay has been the director of research at the University of Hawaii School of Architecture. He is an architect with experience in various environmentally sustainable projects focusing on design, material selection, daylighting, lighting and energy efficiency, as well as site and landscape planning.

April 14, 2004

David Nelson, AIA, principal

Clanton & Associates, Boulder, Colorado

Nelson is a frequent leader of design charrettes and speaks to national conferences. professional organizations and educational institutions about environmental sustainability and architectural lighting design.





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fits all of the parameters of form and function, but in a fresh, surprising, wellthought-out way."

That's the exact approach Wynn and Thomas are taking with the design of Wynn Las Vegas. They don't, says Thomas, accept the fact that anything has been done as well as it can be. "There is a cliché about thinking outside of the box. You're either inside or outside of it. We're looking to get rid of the box altogether."

And like Thomas and the Wynns, Lenahan lives the project. "I can start speaking in the middle of a sentence, talking about any space in the hotel," Thomas says, "and [Steve and Elaine] are in the room with me, they know exactly what the space looks like. They live it as much as I do, so that we can walk around spaces together over dinner. And Todd can do the same thing. For lack of a better term, he gets it."

While Wynn Las Vegas is not the largest nor the most complex project he's ever worked on, Lenahan says it's the most extraordinary. "I have never worked with a client who has been so intensely committed to crafting something of this quality. And I've never worked with a client who is so wonderful about expressing his appreciation for what is being designed on his behalf. Steve concludes every meeting we have by musing about how amazing this job is going to be and why it's going to be wonderful, and he attributes it largely to all of the amazing talent that is invested in this project."

This isn't the first time Wynn and Lenahan have crossed paths. Lenahan attended Eldorado High School during his junior and senior years (his father was stationed at Nellis) when he and four other candidates met with Wynn in the school's cafeteria to discuss the Golden Nugget Scholarship fund. Wynn invited him to see the suites Roger Thomas had designed for the Golden Nugget.

When I inform Wynn that he met Lenahan many years ago—Todd has never brought it up to him—it's a nice surprise. "Hey, Elaine," he says, "did you know that Todd was one of our Golden Nugget Scholarship kids? I can't believe that."

"I have always admired people who were visionaries on a grand scale," Lenahan says. "When I met Steve, he was, in his own regard, a modern-day Walt Disney. I

ultimately worked with Disney because it was a company I felt strongly about. But Steve stuck in my head because of his commitment to completely recrafting places. At the time he was professing creating something in Downtown Las Vegas that was not unlike what Walt Disney was doing when he bought the land in the middle of a Florida swamp. It was just on a different scale."

Anybody who's lived here long enough

knows that more than any other city in the world, this is still the one place where if you do work for so-and-so and they like it, they recommend you to so-and-so, and so on. An endorsement from Roger Thomas doesn't hurt, either. "I always think of Todd as a designer, whereas a lot of the profession I find to be decorators," he says. "He has a very exciting sense of design. His style is not one borrowed from someone else. A lot of other designers I find derivative of other designers. I can categorize them by saying, 'He's very using-the-name-ofanother-more-renowned-designer-esque.' But Todd defies that kind of description."

Thomas introduced Lenahan to Marc and Jane Schorr, Larry Ruvo and John Schadler—all of whom turned to Lenahan for interior design expertise when it came time to design their offices or residences.

The Schorrs' private residence in Park Towers is more Park Avenue penthouse than Vegas high-rise; Ruvo's corporate headquarters for Southern Wine & Spirits, which was inspired by internationally acclaimed Mexican architect Ricardo Legorreta, won a National Association of Office Properties 2003 Spotlight Award for design; Schadler Kramer Group's spirited office space is a whimsical ode to the modern age of advertising.

"The highest compliment I can give Todd is that we are also using ABA to design our operation in Northern Nevada," Ruvo says. "I would also use him for any other future projects as well."

The secret to his success?

"Good design is good business," Lenahan says. "It motivates people to respond the way you want them to." Perhaps that's also the secret to Las Vegas' success.

"We have a project right now that we are doing for a major new resort on the Strip," Lenahan says to further illustrate his point without revealing the client. (In early June, it was reported that the Tropicana would undergo major renovations, but no official announcement is expected to be made until spring.)

So it's the Tropicana?

"A major new resort on the Strip," he continues, careful not to betray any confidences. "And what I said to the president [who at the time was assessing a broad range of designers, several of which were big New York firms] was that my objective as the designer on this job—first and foremost—is to make this project successful, and the way we do that is we separate people from their money. Everyone else was talking about the color of the lobby, the cool art glass, really groovy carpeting and lots of marble. But people work hard for their money. They come from Fargo, North Dakota, Minneapolis, New York City, where all week long they earn and save. And their objective in life is to protect themselves. But they took this trip to Vegas, and now they're feeling a little bit more liberal. It's time to treat themselves. We help them do that. And they leave a little bit of that money here for us."

Must have worked. ABA was hired to participate in the feasibility studies of the redevelopment of the property. Again, topsecret stuff.

"The tradition has been that design firms in Las Vegas that have a commercial or hospitality bent service the casino-hotel resort industry almost as a specialty," Thomas says. "If they are doing work outside Las Vegas, it's usually for a hospitality project with a casino attached. I think Todd is going to be a leader internationally regardless of whether the project has a casino attached. But he will be one of those rare designers that if you want a casino-hotel resort of international quality, he's the obvious choice."

What does that mean for Las Vegas?

"The better the designer in the community," Thomas continues, "it just goes to follow the better the community."

More boutiques, restaurants, medical centers, corporate headquarters, resorts?

"Any impact I have I think will ultimately be collective, it won't be one singular stroke," Lenahan says. "I do feel with the projects that I've done here that I have added to the physical fabric of the community. In a community where there is a lot of disposable design something gets built, something else gets torn down—I hope that the things I've done will have some permanence, not so that they will memorialize me, but because I know that they are good experiences within this city."

Amy Schmidt is Managing Editor of Las Vegas Life magazine.

the fourth year running to teach the Downtown Urban Design Studio. The group of seniors and graduate architecture students meets at the historic Fifth Street School, UNLV extension campus, and uses the Downtown area as their research laboratory.

An experience now available to everyone is the series of 10 self-guided architectural tours of the Valley that are newly posted on the UNLV Architecture Studies Library website, www.library.unlv.edu/arch/lasvegas/drivingtours.html. The tours give a brief history and significance of the structures, and list the architect. They are arranged geographically and include two Downtown and a walking tour of the campus.

The blank slate that is Nevada State College is about to be written on by winners of the design competition, Field Paoli Architects of San Francisco. Project manager Frank Fuller says contracts were signed this May with the Nevada Public Works Board, and work is progressing on three fronts. Campus programmer Ira Fink has been called in to consult on the long view-who and how many will be using the facilities. Secondly, a master plan for the entire campus is translating these projections, and tying in with the phased release by the city of the school's 550 acres. The third aspect, schematic drawings for Phase One buildings, began in August. The three programs will come together in early November, and President Kerry Romesburg will have solid visuals for his efforts to raise the \$10 million of outside funds required to start construction.

Meantime, Henderson is preparing for the new arrival, inking a \$115,000 contract with San Franciscobased design firm EDAW Inc. to put together an environmentally integrated development plan for the large area surrounding the college. An 18-member citizens steering committee will work with EDAW, the Henderson community development department and the college.

During the past seven years, the Community College of Southern Nevada has done more than \$200 million in construction-and no project has been over budget or past schedule. Bob Gilbert, director of planning and design for the past five, is putting that record on the line with two new structures.

The health sciences building on the West Charleston campus has been funded in the amount of \$20 million. JMA is wrapping up the design work, and the project will go to bid by October. The 80,000 square feet, upon completion 14 months later, will be used for nurses' training and associated programs such as radiology, and will include a bio-tech manufacturing lab. Shaded arbors will run between it and two nearby buildings.

Across the Valley on the Cheyenne campus, limestone, stucco and glass provide a neutral palette for the telecommunications building. Martin-Harris Construction began work on the \$20 million, JMA-designed project in June and expects to be finished next September. The 82,000 square feet will ooze with high-tech stuff; a cyclorama studio, television production studio and programs in cooperation with the likes of Sprint and Cisco Systems to train folks in a variety of disciplines, from

fiber optics to magnetic levitation for superspeed rail transport. Despite the subdued colors, Gilbert says this building has more flair: A bridge will create a gateway welcoming people to the pedestrian mall. Also, the building, with a typical contemporary flare, is named after state Assemblyman Morse Arberry Jr., rather than a noted technology pioneer.

Tate Snyder Kimsey Architects has designed the new high school prototype for the district—the first since 1988. The design, done with extensive student participation, received the 2002 Council of Educational Facility Planners International Project of Distinction Award. The first building based on the new prototype will open in 2005 and accommodate 2,700 students. There will be two major improvements, according to the district's director of facility planning and engineering, Dale Scheideman, AIA: To make smaller, more personal groups, each grade will have its own "house," complete with administration and teachers, for its core curriculum; secondly, the open courtyard will be replaced by a large enclosed "mall," roofed, air conditioned and naturally lighted, which will feed every other room in the school.

Two other concepts for the district are in the design works. Swisher & Hall has been awarded the mission for a career and technical center, which will contain six academies (including hospitality, medical, child care, technology, construction) for grades 9-12. The special vocational school, at Centennial Parkway just west of Highway 95, is budgeted at \$40 million for the 210,000 square feet.

The second project will be the first of its kind in the nation-a "K-13" school to accommodate 210 students with severe behavioral problems. The 40,000-square-foot building with a \$10 million budget will consist mostly of small classrooms manned by specialized teachers and aides, and will be near Pecos Road and Stewart Avenue. JMA Studios has taken on the challenge of preparing for construction bids within a year and getting it opened by fall 2005.

Tate Snyder Kimsey is also at work on the site of our oldest high schools. A two-building addition to the campus of the Las Vegas Academy of International Studies, Performing and Visual Arts will go to bid at the end of September with expected completion in spring 2005. The \$2 million visual arts classroom building will house labs for photography, computer graphics, ceramics and video production. But the main attraction is the 750-seat stateof-the-art performing arts theater. Project architect Steve Ranck says the \$12 million, 42,000-square-foot structure will be "professional quality-as good as any on the Strip," complete with an electro-acoustic enhancement system that can tune electronically to the varying ranges required for musicals, drama or instrumentals. In a modern adaptation of traditional elements, the interior will have vertical molding details that appear to be wood to provide sound diffusion. And yes, Ranck says, the classic exterior stylings of the historic high school will be complemented by the new buildings—the large windows on the theater's front elevation illuminate its lobby, where visual arts exhibits will be displayed. The theater has yet to be named, but, Ranck says, "They're looking for donors." 🔄





Icehouse continued from Page 53

fresh. South Beach-inspired structure. how does it relate to Vegas? And we said, Well, if it's going to be Icehouse, let's make an ice bar. [He points to the circular, tiled bar area.] The whole idea is an extraction of ice cubes. That's why the tiles are little aqua cubes, an extraction for ice. And then we said we've got to have an ice trough ..."

Gruwell stops and looks at the mist makers. "I'll be right back," he says.

I seize the opportunity to visit the rest room. Five minutes later, back at our table, he talks about his inspiration for the colors and the rest of the decor, which leads to his epiphany on referencing Vegas: "I had a flash of, You know what, I know how to make it be Vegas: Have it be about Vegas! I said let's get all the old photography of Downtown and the Strip. I enlarged them, shrunk them, decided to put them everywhere."

Even the rest room.

"That was one of my favorite things to do. There was a white border, and I decided to shrink the photos and make a border out of them."

Do Vegas and Miami work together? "I actually feel like I'm in South Beach when I'm in here. There's a tropical, refreshing atmosphere in South Beach. It's vacationlike. But vacation is not the right word ..."

Escape?

Yeah, there's still a better word for it ... it's like you're suspended in time.

Transported?

"Transfixed, transformed ... maybe. Anyway, there's something tropical about it. something's refreshing about it. It doesn't feel like Las Vegas-showgirls and casinos. It has its own theme, and that's a fresh place in South Beach."

What is the smallest detail that you designed? Is it this coaster?

"Yes. I did the matchbooks, too, but they're not here yet. As the design director, I was in charge of designing the interior and exterior, doing all the furniture and fabrics and artwork and the graphic design package, down to matchbooks, logos and exterior signage. There's no detail that I wasn't in charge of, except the bar and kitchen."

Another fog break. He's back in a couple of minutes with an update: "One air conditioner is out, and they said if it's cooler in here the night of the party it'll keep the fog down lower. Right now it's hot, so it's rising."

What are you most proud of?

"I love the whole entry sequence, the floating staircase, these columns, the floating soffit, and I'm very excited about the color scheme in here. I don't think I've ever used lime-green, aqua-blue and red-orange together in any project, and it really works like a dream."

I like the light, the natural light. "There's an openness, a real freshness about walking into this space."

Downtown is anything but fresh. And you walked into the situation of being near the Fremont Street Experience, which no locals ever talk about coming down here to see, and Neonopolis, which many people consider a flop.

"Yeah, it's not somewhere I would go." But you're putting this place in a place with that stigma. You have some things that are working, you have a little bit of the arts district happening ... you can extend that list if you want.

Gruwell laughs. "I'm proud of the bravery of the ownership, for the very reasons you're saying. They still went forward with it. It brings a level of sophistication, a level of cosmopolitan chic to Downtown that doesn't exist. I think we're a front-runner. The Icehouse will be the catalyst to the other buildings and businesses that will help revitalize Downtown."

Two, three, five years from now, how do you see that theory being applied?

"I'll use my fantasy. If it was me, I'd buy that place across the street and turn it into a fun, retro, Miami-looking hotel, and I could see that lot right over there [on the northside] ... I wish they'd do something that would complement this space—maybe a really cool theater. That'd be perfect if there was a theater here. You could come here and eat and have a drink, go to the movies ... there'd be a whole symbiotic thing. Once you get that going ... if somebody would put an interesting, hip club down here, a real nightclub, people would come here to eat and then go there, it will help revitalize Downtown. I live in Henderson and go to the Strip, and so do people who live in Summerlin. Well, why don't they stop in Downtown? If there was somewhere to stop Downtown, they probably would."

How much of that was present in your mind—the need to lure people Downtown when you were designing this?

"We talked about that, and Martin Herbert [Icehouse's operations director] said, 'Wait a minute. What about everybody who already is Downtown? What about the 20,000 employees who are here day and night? What about the 700 attorneys down the street, what about the workers at UMC and the county building? Aren't there plenty of people Downtown to support this?' So we said let's just do it."

What about the other aspect of building right here: You have tall windows, no curtains, a nice unobstructed view ... except for what you see—THAT across the street and the adult bookstore. How did that weigh on you?

"I think we made the inside so attractive that you don't care if you look out. I've never even looked outside since we've been talking. There's a real focus on the interior space. There are no vistas to accentuate, so you're inner-focused, as opposed to outer-focused."

You do have one visual opportunity, and that's the Clark County Government Center. How did you deal with that?

"We actually like it, we like the building. We thought it would enhance our upperlounge view. ... In fact, it's better looking from that vantage point."

We're doing a story on nightclubs [Page 46] in which the writer and an architect are pondering how much design matters in such spaces. The main objective of a place like this is to keep people coming back. How much does design matter?

"I think it's what drives the business. Of course you come for food, for alcohol, to have a cigarette or to play video poker, but those are results of something. But you have to come to some place. You come to a design. We're sitting in a design. The design is what drives the experience. So when you say is it important, it is the single most important thing. Without the design, what do you have? Without the design of Bellagio, what do you have? Or Panevino or Ghostbar? It's the design that you're going to see. You won't go to a big ol' white room."

Does design succeed because it makes a place to eat, drink and talk, or because it makes a place distinctive?

"You mentioned that this place was affordable, and you may be thinking, 'What am I going to do tonight? I don't feel like getting dressed up, I don't want to spend a lot of money, but I want to have a good experience—let's go to the Icehouse.' You'll go there because you like the design. It's how you'll decide where you're going to go. For me, an example is Mon Ami Gabi, one of my favorite restaurants in town because of the outside, its proximity to Bellagio, you can watch the fountains, it's easy to get in and out of. Love to go there. But even if I wasn't the designer of this place, knowing how I judge things and filter things, I'd come here because I like what I'm looking at, it's affordable, it feels fresh-all these different factors. Besides the aesthetic visual design, there are all the other things that are part of a good design—the furniture and fixtures and things in the space you want to transform yourself to while you eat or talk or have a party. So design is at the core of all those experiences we've talked about."

What about the 24-hour thing? That's obviously not a factor everywhere for designers.

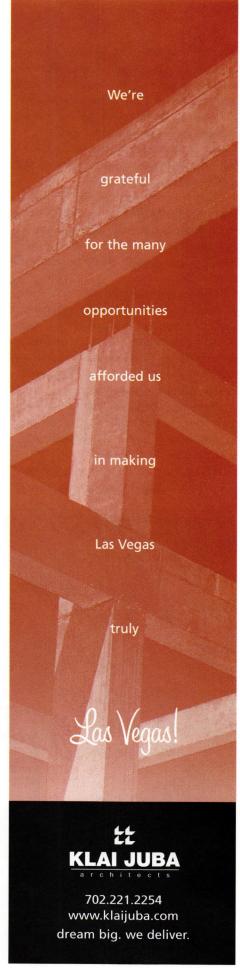
It works equally well as a nighttime space as it does a daytime space. There's a freshness and a lightness in the day, and an intrigue and a drama and a mood at night. All the neon glows and feels comfortable and contemporary. The light show, the \$80,000 light show, is phenomenal.

What have you learned from this? Your answer doesn't have to be about lounges or materials that you've used; it could be about the city itself.

"I think that living here for seven years is how I was able to create this space. I moved here from LA, where there's a whole vibe and hip scene, and I came here on the crest of Bellagio, the Venetian, Mandalay Baywhen a major reinventing of Las Vegas was taking place. And I was involved in that process at Four Seasons and Mandalay Bay. And then going to the venues here, I see the most incredible designers doing state-of-theart design-Tony Chi, Jeffrey Beers, Todd Lenahan, Wilson & Associates [of Dallas], Michael Bedner [of Santa Monica]—there's major talent all over Vegas for me to draw from. And so seeing all of this design—it's like an international design hub nowhelped me create a design for this space. It's Vegas, and the influence of Vegas design is at the core of how I designed this. Had I not lived in Vegas the past seven years, I could not have designed this the way I have."

It's essential to understand the environment in which you're building.

"Exactly. Not just for the design talent, but by living in the terrain, in going to Summerlin,



going out to Boulder City, by living here and being a part of the pulse of Vegas—and there definitely is a pulse here—I was able to design this space with sophistication and panache.'

In how many cities can you build whatever you want next to a huge sandstone government center? Where else can you import something and make it work—and people would understand it?

"Right. And that's the beauty of living in Vegas. You have the license of fantasy. It's all about fantasy. So you can transport or transfix yourself anywhere in the world—or with Star Trek, anywhere in the universe. It's fantasy world."

What's your next project?

"I've been approached to do a couple of nightclubs here—can't say where yet. And I'm in negotiations to do a brand-new home up in the Ridges [see Page 27], a brand-new Frank Lloyd Wright residence. Very much looking forward to working on it."

There are a lot of nightclubs out there right now. Do you chase that, or do you do something completely different? And does what you've done here ...

"This is a primer. It's like teeing me up to design a nightclub. Because there are so

many elements that are nightclub-like in this particular structure, with the lounge upstairs, with the lighting and neon, and the music systems. I've done other restaurants before, but nothing this sophisticated. So this has gotten me prepared to plateau up."

With all the nightclubs out there to compare with the one you'll be conceiving, do you go in with blinders?

"Of course we'd have to study the Vegas market, but I think about nightclubs in Hong Kong. I saw the Felix that Philippe Starck did in the Peninsula Hotel, which is really interesting, and nightclubs in New York and Singapore. You have to see where the pulse is and bring it back to Vegas. Like Tabu, brilliant design—Jeffrey Beers. Love that design. It's cutting-edge, new thinking, and he's an inspiration to me. Other designers' work is where I get my inspiration."

Our editorial team preferred Risque over Tabu.

"Been there many times. I like it, but Tabu's way more sophisticated. I like the lounge in the back and the whole passageway of Risque, the way you can look out over the Strip and the dance floor. So don't get me wrong, I like going there whenever I go

out on my little circuit, but Tabu, the materials—from a designer's point of view—are top-notch; it's just very, very well executed. Great details."

With that, we move up to the Icehouse's Retro Lounge, where he loves the depth of space and the seductive quality and, topping the list, a much enlarged black-and-white photo of the Flamingo around the time it first opened. "I wish we could see some of old Vegas harnessed. It's great to see the new Vegas on the Strip and all, but ... and what did I do? I built a brand-new building!" He laughs at this self-discovered irony, but I suggest that this type of new might be more significant than he thinks, that true New Vegas design has yet to be invented.

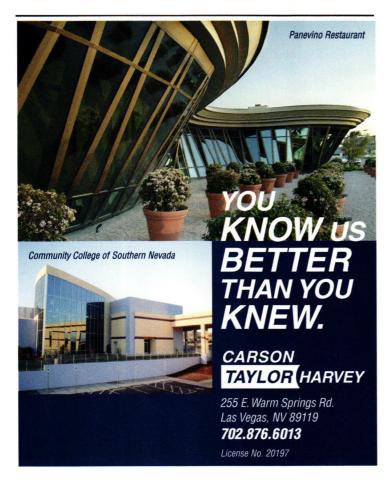
How do you think this place reflects the definition of New Vegas?

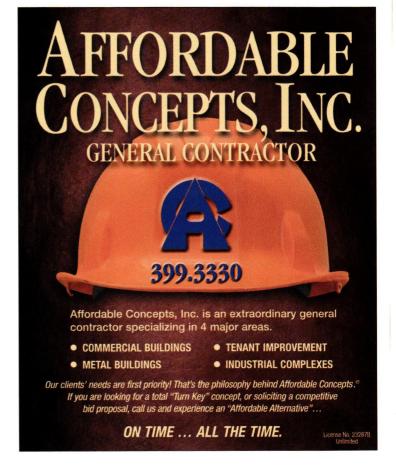
"It's fresh, with a look back on the old. It's a contemporary reference to what used to be."

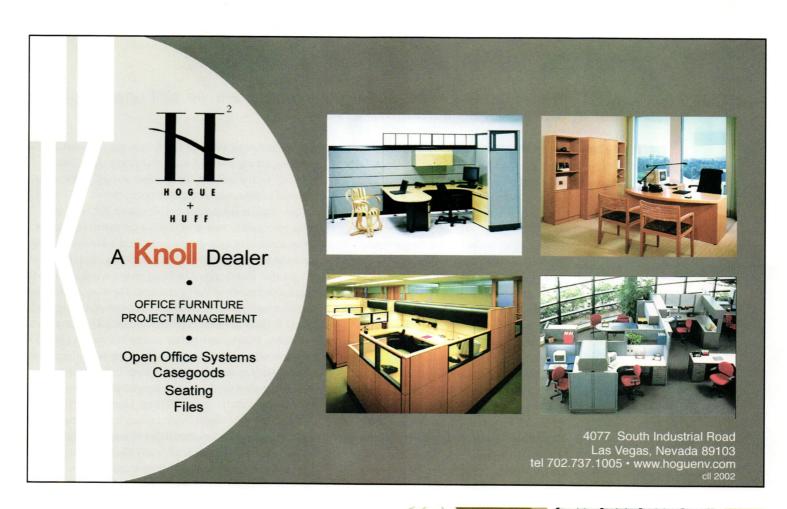
Sounds like you might have something there.

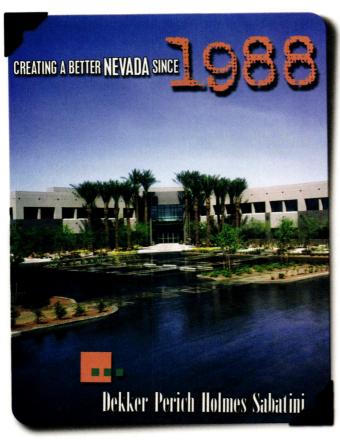
"I hope a good design comes out of Vegas for Vegas. And, who knows, maybe somebody will import Vegas from Vegas."

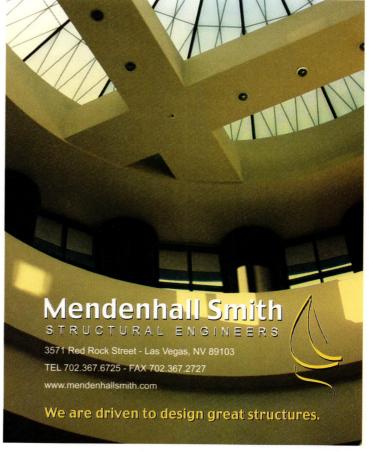
At this point, the fog machine is long gone. 4











Junked Bonds

Why, 10 years after the Hunsberger controversy, are we still unwilling to invest in well-designed libraries?

By the time you read this, it will be old news, but as I write it's as fresh as an unsutured wound. Clark County voters have turned down another round of library bonds. Last fall, a similarly skeptical electorate nixed a library bond proposal in Henderson.

Rationales are easy to grasp—the economy's down, the state's in a budget bind, we're not funding schools

properly. And it's easy to imagine that native tax distrust welcomed an infusion of fresh wariness from all of those Eastern retirees. Not on my pension, thank you.

Short-sightedness often betrays short memories. More than a third of us were not here in 1991 when voters approved an \$80 million library bond measure. That investment capped the visionary building program launched by former Clark County Library director Charles Hunsberger. Among the structures built under Hunsberger's leadership were the Las Vegas Library, the district's flagship, designed by the celebrated New Mexico architect Antoine Predock, and

Michael Graves' remodel/addition of the Clark County Library on East Flamingo Road.

But two years after that bond vote, and with another year on his contract, Hunsberger resigned in order to stem dissension. At its core was the charge that he had forsaken books for bricks and minds for mortar. Not surprisingly, that assertion arose again as the library district approached voters this spring with building plans. In an editorial, the Review-Journal scoffed at the district's plans and leveled a blast at the decade-departed Hunsberger's "Taj Mahals."

Architects cringe whenever politicians and editorial writers invoke the name of the 17th-century mausoleum that Shah Jahan built for his favorite wife. Arguably one of the most beautiful and popular edifices ever erected, it is nonetheless one of history's most excessive indulgences. No one seems to mind that politicians conduct public business in elaborate Greco-Roman temples, which certify to us our presumed blessed destiny as democracy's citadel. But do we really expect that everything else built on the public dime should be a cinderblock box with a tin roof?

This question is peculiarly apt in our Valley. The "decorated sheds" celebrated 30 years ago by Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour have morphed into palatial estates that would shame a Mughal despot. Meanwhile, much beyond the Strip is as unrelievedly dull as every other American suburban-scape—spreads of sheds meanly and cheaply decorated. But as I drive around the Valley, here and there I notice exceptions. A bank branch

with an intriguing blend of forms. A restaurant with an arresting arrangement of surface textures. An office entrance with a cleverly cantilevered awning. Little signs that real architecture actually happens here.

Las Vegas is not unique in this regard, but few other cities have had to face down such a pervasive reputation for tackiness. Striking design helps lend a sense of permanence to a community mired in transience. And it can be argued that Hunsberger's building program helped pave the way, helped prove to Valley residents that they should not consider themselves of necessity condemned to crap and kitsch. It provided local firms the opportunity to stretch a bit. Welles-Pugsley turned out an airy but sedate play of volumes, with a lofty entrance hall, at the West Charleston Library. Holmes Sabatini (now Dekker Perich Holmes Sabatini) contributed a neatly desert-adapted succession of building-block forms in the Whitney Library. (DPHS also designed the new Paseo Verde Library in Henderson, but even that splendid structure failed to inspire voters.)

But what about books, after all? Shouldn't we spend our money on them instead? Why build galleries, such as the superb space the Minneapolis firm Meyer, Scherer & Rockcastle built into the Sahara West Library, or theaters, such as the one Michael Graves grafted onto the Clark County facility? Well, for that matter, why build libraries when you can get everything you want from a computer in your den? "The library as a community center is a very valid idea," says Fred Schlipf, director of the Urbana (Illinois) Free Library. "People are more isolated now than they were 30 or 40 years ago." Schlipf's point is particularly apt in our community, which uses walls and gates to encourage privacy and, when residents do escape, offers few public places for them to congregate.

As a consultant on library building projects, Schlipf has seen design exuberance—what he calls "magazine architecture"—that yields "very brutal post-occupancy evaluations," with poor lighting and circulation and unadaptable spaces. But he blames clients as well as architects for this. "It isn't making it just handsome, or making it just functional, but both," he says, echoing architecture's basic creed.

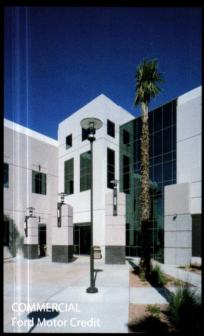
Admittedly, not all of Hunsberger's Mughal monuments meet this standard. Graves' library is one of his least graceful efforts, inside and out. But I've always been dubious about hiring famous architects to do a local's job. Architects here have proven, thanks to Hunsberger and others, that they can produce thoughtful, fluid public buildings. We should not be too nearsighted to ask them to build more. 4

Chuck Twardy writes a column about art and architecture called Optic Nerve for Las Vegas Weekly.



Story by Chuck Twardy

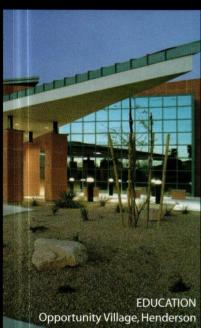
Illustration by Christopher Smith

















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